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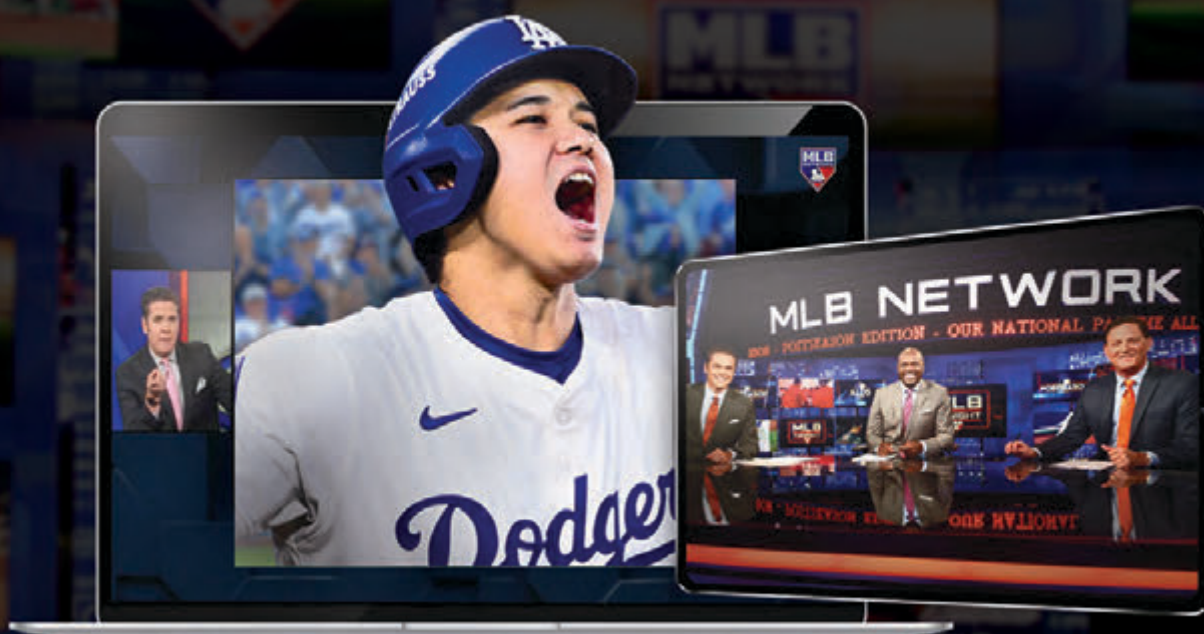
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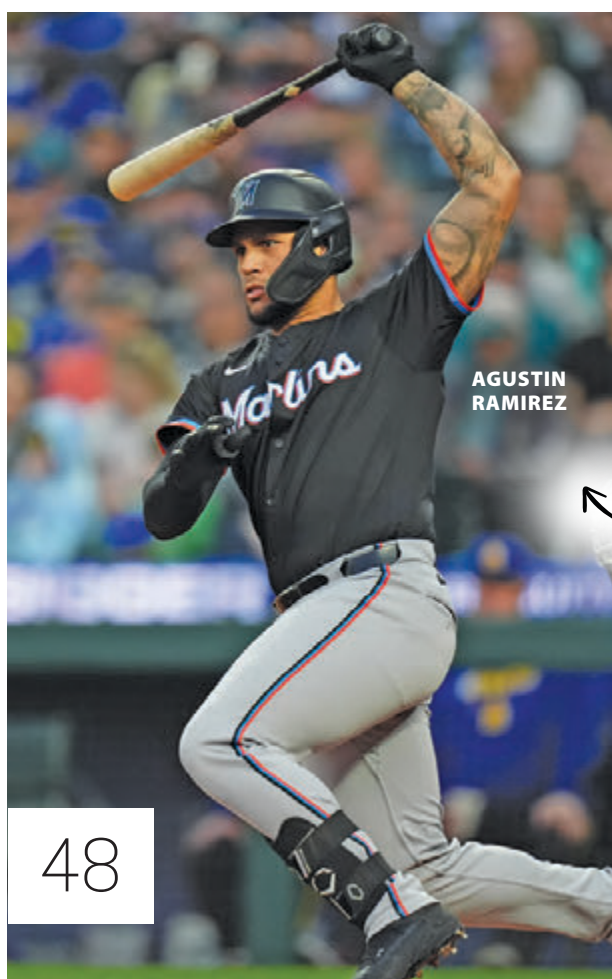
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COVER PHOTO BY GREG FIUME/GETTY IMAGES

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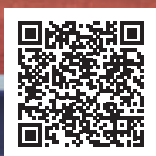


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First Pitch

MAKING SENSE OF SOMETIMES DENSE ANALYTICS IN BASEBALL

ROOKIES WITH BENEFITS

Nine rookies have the potential to add Propsect Promotion Incentive eligibility

by MATT EDDY

Eight rookies on MLB Opening Day rosters had the potential to gain Prospect Promotion Incentive eligibility. Reds righthander **Rhett Lowder** began the season on the major league injured list, giving him a path to PPI eligibility. More on him later.

The number of PPI hopefuls climbed to 10 when the Rockies called up righthander **Chase Dollander** on April 6, but the number fell back to nine about a week later when the Cubs optioned third baseman **Matt Shaw** to Triple-A.

In order for PPI eligibility to attach, a player must accrue at least 172 days of MLB service as a rookie. That requires staying on the active roster—or MLB injured list—all season.

Any PPI-eligible player who wins Rookie of the Year or finishes top three for MVP or Cy Young Award as a second- or third-year player will earn his club a draft pick after the first round in the next draft.

Corbin Carroll, **Gunnar Henderson** and **Julio Rodriguez** have earned PPI draft picks for their clubs via ROY wins. **Bobby Witt Jr.** finished runner-up for American League MVP last year to become the first player to bestow a PPI pick for an award finish other than ROY.

Not every rookie on an Opening Day roster is eligible for PPI. Players must appear on at least two of three qualifying Top 100 Prospects lists—Baseball America, ESPN and MLB—and also have no more than 60 days of prior MLB service.

That last clause disqualifies two high-profile rookies: Yankees left fielder **Jasson Dominguez** and Athletics shortstop **Jacob Wilson**. Dominguez entered 2025 with 130 service days and Wilson with 73. Most of that time was accrued on the injured list, which does not count against rookie eligibility but can nullify PPI eligibility.

Now, let's meet this year's PPI hopefuls.

Drake Baldwin, C, Braves

The Braves' No. 1 prospect was a good bet to spend a lot of time in Atlanta this season after a strong 2024 in the upper minors.

PPI Outlook: Good. Baldwin settled into a catching tandem with Sean Murphy.

Kristian Campbell, 2B, Red Sox

From 2023 fourth-round pick to Minor League Player of the Year in 2024, Campbell has as much helium as any rookie.

PPI Outlook: Good. Campbell started the year hot while playing three positions.

Dylan Crews, RF, Nationals

Drafted No. 2 overall out of LSU in 2023, Crews hit his way to Double-A in his pro debut and then to D.C. in late August 2024.

PPI Outlook: Good. Crews recovered from a slow start to show all-around ability.

Chase Dollander, RHP, Rockies

Dollander was one of the Rockies' final spring cuts but made only one Triple-A start before his callup. That gave him time to meet the 172 service days requirement.

PPI Outlook: Questionable. Life is hard for Rockies pitchers, and Dollander had given up eight homers through 19.1 innings.

Jackson Jobe, RHP, Tigers

Jobe made his MLB debut toward the end of last season and appeared in two postseason games.

PPI Outlook: Good. Jobe won a rotation spot and helped Detroit start hot.

Kumar Rocker, RHP, Rangers

Rocker threw one of the filthiest sliders in the minor leagues last season and rode the pitch to a September callup to Texas.

PPI Outlook: Questionable. Hit hard through five starts, Rocker went on the IL with a shoulder injury in late April.

Roki Sasaki, RHP, Dodgers

Sasaki pitched for four seasons in Japan but counts as PPI-eligible because he entered MLB through the international bonus pool



Drake Baldwin hit his way onto the Braves' Opening Day roster and assumed a share of the catching job with veteran Sean Murphy.

system rather than as a "foreign professional."

PPI Outlook: Good. Sasaki was smoothing his rough edges as he adapted to MLB.

Cam Smith, RF, Astros

Smith made Houston's Opening Day roster after being drafted 14th overall out of Florida State last year by the Cubs. Chicago traded him to the Astros in the offseason as the key piece to acquire Kyle Tucker.

PPI Outlook: Good. The natural third baseman was learning right field on the fly.

Special Case Rhett Lowder, RHP, Reds

Lowder did not pitch in spring training because of elbow soreness. Because he finished last season in Cincinnati, he began this season on the MLB injured list.

Lowder could still add PPI eligibility in two scenarios:

- (1) He recovers from his elbow trouble, goes on a minor league rehab assignment and then returns to MLB without making an optional assignment of more than 20 days.
- (2) He misses the entire 2025 season on the injured list. In this scenario, Lowder accrues a full year of MLB service. This is how **Cade Cavalli** and **Ronny Mauricio** added PPI eligibility in 2023 and 2024. ■

Baseball America

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From Phenom To The Farm

FORMER BALLPLAYERS REFLECT ON PRO SUCCESS AND FAILURE

BETTING ON HIMSELF

From college walk-on to MLB, speedy outfielder Ian Miller defied the odds

by KYLE BANDUJO

As a teenager, Ian Miller didn't have the typical pedigree of a future big leaguer.

He had been cut from his seventh grade American Legion team and didn't make varsity until his junior year of high school. The outfielder was a late bloomer. He was undersized and underdeveloped, but even as he waited to fill out, there was one thing going for him.

"I always had speed," Miller said. "That's how I didn't get overlooked. I was able to get my foot in the door."

Miller couldn't put on a show during batting practice but could when running from home to first. A perfectly placed drag bunt caught the eye of the coaching staff at Wagner, giving Miller the opportunity to walk on to the Staten Island-based program during the fall of 2010, but with no guarantees.

"There was nothing promised to me," Miller said. "Nothing at all."

Miller's speed earned him a spot on Wagner's roster, where he started as a freshman. He then broke out during the summer of 2012 in the Alaska League, showcasing his speed by pacing the league with 36 steals and making the all-star game.

Miller went from walk-on to draft prospect, and, after notching another 46 bags for Wagner the ensuing spring, he was selected by the Mariners in the 14th round of the 2013 draft.

Per usual, Miller's path to the big leagues was going to be through his legs. Pro ball meant swiping bags off the best of the best. He learned quickly those steals meant not worrying about

the catcher—all of them were good—and instead focusing who was on the mound.

"My tells had a lot to do with the pitcher," Miller said. "I never worried about the catcher. You steal the bag off the pitcher, regardless."

As Miller moved through the minors, he carried the same mentality that had gotten him through high school and college. That meant putting tireless work in and "owning 12 p.m. to 6 p.m."

Swing changes, approach changes and a tip from Dee Strange-Gordon to choke up on the bat took Miller to Triple-A during the 2017 season, where he waited for an opportunity and kept stealing bags.

The Twins, looking to add a basestealing threat ahead of the 2019 postseason, traded for Miller.



JASON MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

After a few weeks in Triple-A, which included swiping a bag off a quick-to-the-plate pitcher in front of Twins brass, Miller got his unlikely callup. A well-placed drag bunt as a high schooler had gotten him all the way to the big leagues, and he appeared in 12 games for Minnesota.

Miller got back to the big leagues in 2020, earning a callup to play at an empty Wrigley Field with the Cubs during the pandemic-shortened season. After spending all of 2021 at Triple-A, Miller decided he was finally ready to rest his legs and move on from the day-in, day-out grind of professional baseball.

In looking back on his career, Miller said he wouldn't tell his younger self to change a thing.

"I would just say one thing: 'You're right . . . just keep betting on yourself.' " ■

As a late-blooming high school player who walked on to his college team, Ian Miller had to fight for every opportunity. Stealing 30 or more bases for five minor league seasons in a row earned him a brief MLB career in 2019 and 2020.

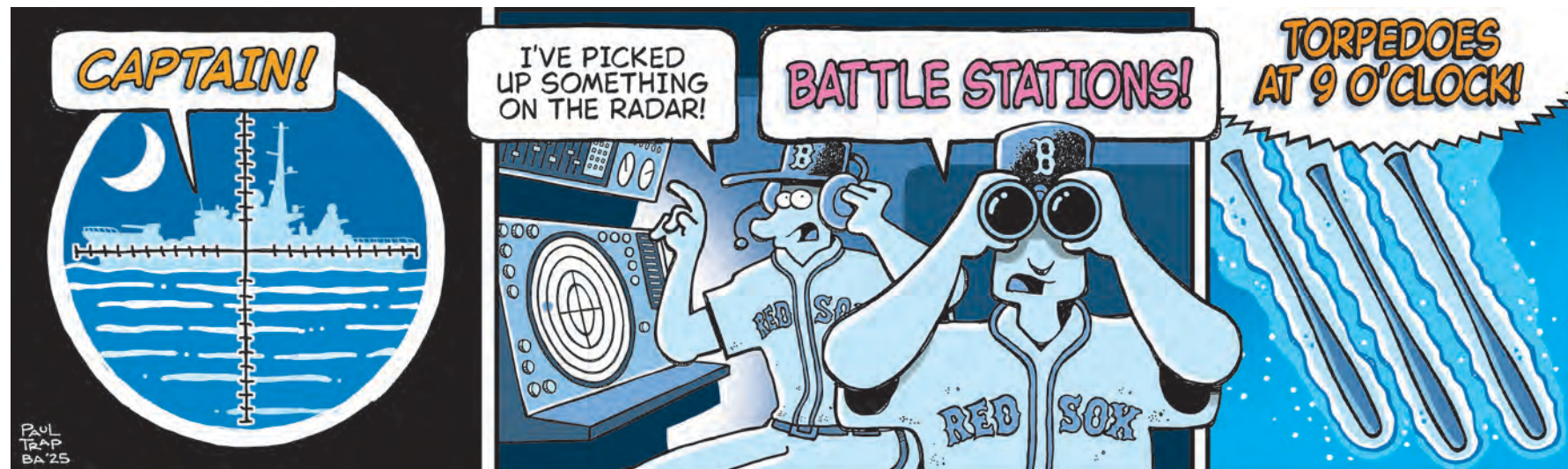


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FASTBALL includes four-seamers, sinkers and cutters
OFFSPEED includes changeups, splitters, forkballs and screwballs
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BREAKING
VELO



Paul Skenes

2024

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Life comes at you fast, especially if you're a major league hitter.

The average MLB pitch velocity keeps climbing—and it's not just fastballs.

Pitchers today throw faster sinkers, sliders, curveballs and changeups than ever before.

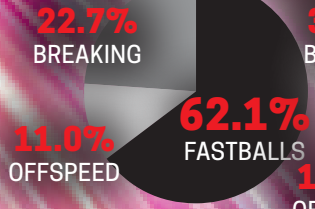
Young guns Hunter Greene and Paul Skenes set the new MLB standard, while ageless Aroldis Chapman continues firing triple-digit heat into his late 30s.

Velocity pursuits show no sign of slowing.

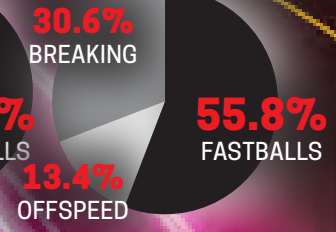
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THE VELO CITY ISSUE

FAST LEARNER

Hunter Greene has thrown 100 mph since he was a teenager. Last year, by learning to *really* pitch, he fulfilled his potential as the Reds' ace.

by CHARLIE GOLDSMITH

It's May 19, 2024. Reds righthander Hunter Greene has two outs in the sixth inning against the Dodgers in Los Angeles. The Reds are down 2-1, and Dodgers second baseman Gavin Lux steps to the plate.

Needing his best pitch to keep the Reds and their taxed bullpen in the game, Greene reaches back and throws his fastest pitch of the entire season.

His 100.9 mph fastball jams the lefthanded-hitting Lux, who hits an inning-ending grounder to second base.

Even after firing that bullet, Greene still had plenty left in the tank. He went back out for the seventh inning with the score now tied and fired 99 mph pitches.

Greene made the leap in 2024 and became an all-star because he was able to use his velocity as a tool. When the Reds needed his best pitch in the biggest moment, he delivered.

"The endurance, being able to consistently be in or finish that seventh inning was huge," Greene said during spring training, "especially being tapped as the ace.

"When you get that title, you need to at least be in that seventh inning. I feel like being able to consistently do that last year was very special and good for the team. I want to be even better at that and go even deeper this year."

This wasn't always the case.



MAY 5, 2022

In a career low point, Greene allows five home runs in one start against the Brewers



MAY 19, 2024

Greene signals his arrival by throwing his fastest pitch of the season to get a big out

Greene graced the cover of *Sports Illustrated* when he was a 17-year-old senior at Notre Dame High in suburban Los Angeles because he threw the ball very hard. He was a candidate to be the first prep righthander in draft history to be selected No. 1 overall.

Ultimately, the Twins chose fellow SoCal prep Royce Lewis with the first pick in 2017. The Reds took Greene with the second pick.

To this day, Greene is one of just nine high school righthanders to be drafted No. 2 overall. Josh Beckett, J.R. Richard and Bill Gullickson are the most accomplished major league pitchers in the cohort.

Greene made the Reds' Opening Day roster in 2022. As a rookie, he threw 338 pitches at 100 mph or faster. Just 32 of those pitches were thrown after the sixth inning. He also threw nine pitches of at least 102 mph, and none of them was thrown after the third.

In some starts, he would quickly wear down and then sit 93-95 mph.

"It's one thing to throw as hard as he does," Reds lefthander Nick Lodolo said. "It's another to really pitch with that velocity."

Three years ago, Greene didn't really trust his fastball.

Throughout his amateur career and heading into the 2017 draft, he heard skeptics say that his fastball was a very straight pitch. When hitters knew that it was coming, they pounced.

Greene allowed 20 home runs in his first 14 big league starts, and the low point was a May 5 game in Milwaukee in which he allowed five homers as the Reds fell to 3-22 on the season.

"He had always been told that he had work to do with his fastball," Reds pitching coach Derek Johnson said. "He got to the big leagues, and he had that in his mind. It needed to be a better pitch.

"For me, it was (him) needing to locate it better and understanding how to use it better. A

part of that was just him believing in the pitch being good."

Right around that point in Greene's rookie season, he had an all-hands meeting with the training staff, medical staff and pitching coaches. They developed a new training regimen that would help with his endurance.

It paid off.

Greene finished his rookie season strong, posting a 1.75 ERA over his final eight starts.

Still, Greene wasn't going deep into games. His fastball was getting more consistent, but he wasn't leading the Reds to wins in the way that he wanted.

To get the most out of his fastball, he had to develop a third pitch that he was actually willing to throw.

"It's about understanding how to pitch," Greene said. "Throwing harder is not always the best. Knowing that in certain situations, that's been big."

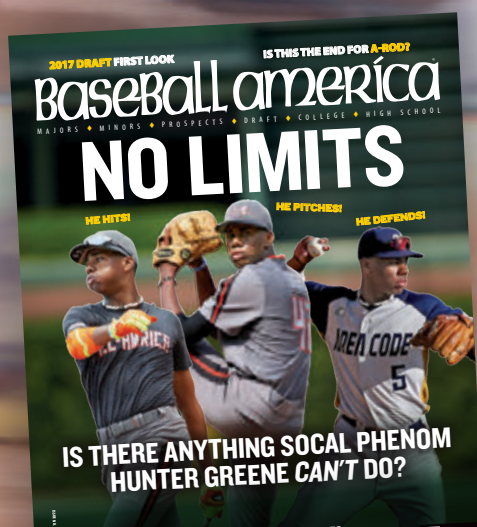
Greene developed more vertical break on his fastball. He started locating the pitch where he wanted. He got more consistent with his slider and got lefthanded hitters off-balance with a new splitter.

He also developed the ability to throw his best pitches in the biggest moments of the game, getting more consistent with his velocity.

"That's what he's really able to do now, and that's what separates him," Lodolo said. "He's pitching.

"Everyone gets enamored with the fact that he throws 100. If you watch him, there's so much more to his game than throwing 100. He can truly pitch the ball. He takes a lot of pride in that, and it shows up."

In 2024, Greene threw his fastest pitch of the year with two outs to end the sixth inning. He threw 14 pitches of at least 100 mph in the sixth inning or later. He didn't hit 102 mph, but he didn't need to in order to be an all-star.



Greene shined on the high school summer circuit in 2016.

THE VELOCITY CITY ISSUE

During his breakthrough season, Greene posted a 2.75 ERA in 26 starts. His .183 opponent average was lowest among pitchers with at least 150 innings. He also completed six-plus innings in 17 of his 26 starts.

"Every year, I've been able to grow and add what's necessary for my game," Greene said. "I feel like I've been able to tap into the mental side to be the best version of myself."

As Greene lived up to his potential, he took a bit of a victory lap.

"(It) might be validating for others who

might have second-guessed (me)," he said. "But for myself, I'm honestly not surprised."

The questions about Greene's fastball were loud when he was a prospect. His fastball was hittable, and the industry is always concerned that flamethrowers like Greene are going to burn out.

He had Tommy John surgery in 2019, and he couldn't pitch in minor league games in 2020 because of the pandemic. Thus, he missed two full years of development.

The Reds weren't particularly worried about the risk with Greene when they drafted him in 2017 and signed him for \$7.23 million, which remains a record for a high school pitcher.

"Tommy John is a pitching injury," Reds president of baseball operations Nick Krall said. "It's not as simple as, 'You throw hard, you get Tommy John.' There are a lot of pitchers who have gotten hurt no matter how hard they throw.

"Hunter is a really good pitcher. We want good pitchers. We ask if you can get outs in the

big leagues."

Krall gave an example in reliever Brent Suter, who had never thrown a big league pitch faster than 90 mph before he had Tommy John in 2019.

There's also Wade Miley, a notorious old-school crafty lefthander who had Tommy John surgery.

The Reds weren't going to pass on Greene in the draft just because he threw hard. They followed the same approach in 2024, when Krall used the No. 2 pick to draft Wake Forest righthander Chase Burns, who has hit 102 mph.

"Velocity is still a pretty big deal in the game," Johnson said. "Maybe it was just where we picked and who we had to choose from. It's nice when you have big-bodied pitchers who throw hard and have secondary offerings that you can polish up."

Still, Greene's combination of velocity and durability is pretty rare in the big leagues right now.

From his 2022 debut through the 2024 sea-

MOST PITCHES THROWN 100 MPH OR FASTER

STARTING PITCHERS • 2022-2024

HUNTER GREENE ALONE HAS THROWN 470 PITCHES AT 100 MPH OR FASTER. THE NEXT NINE STARTING PITCHERS COMBINED HAVE 535 TOTAL.

HUNTER
GREENE

RHP



470

PAUL
SKENES

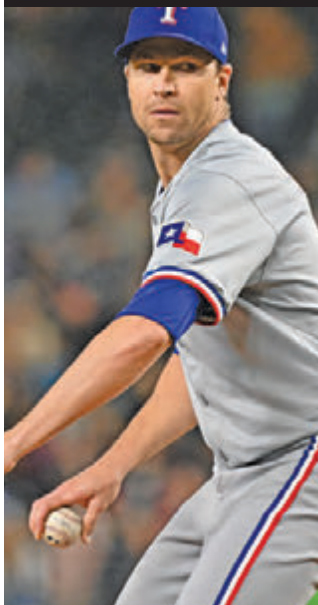
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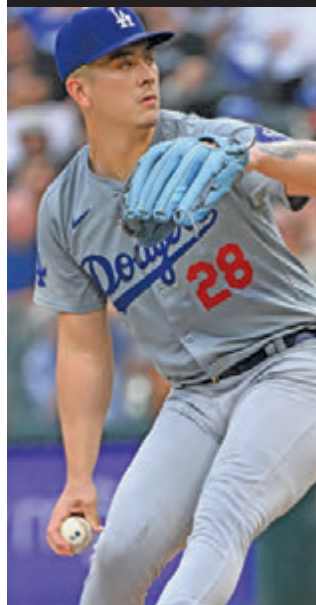
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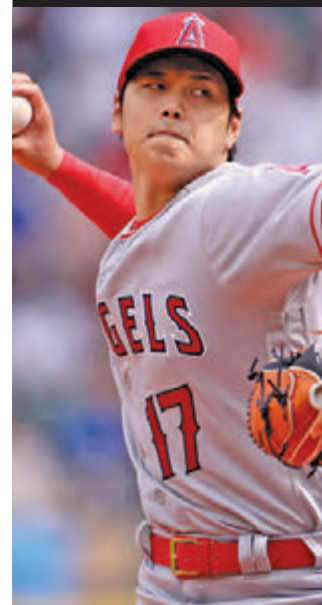
RHP



89

SHOHEI
OHTANI

RHP



52

PLAYERS AND TEAMS COME TO ACCEPT RISKS OF VELOCITY

As multiple peer-reviewed studies have shown, throwing harder increases a pitcher’s risk of elbow injuries. While the exact force a pitcher puts on his elbow ligament varies by pitcher, any pitcher adds to the stresses on his ligament when he throws harder.

Everyone in baseball is trying to figure out ways to reduce the ever-increasing numbers of elbow injuries and Tommy John surgeries, but there is a tricky conun-

drum. In general, throwing harder makes pitchers more effective.

So while pitchers know they are increasing their risk of injury when they increase their velocity, they also know additional velocity increases their chances of making an MLB roster and sticking around.

Professional athletes tend to be more risk-tolerant than the average adult, and the risks associated with pitching at a high level include the potential for career-altering injuries. It is a risk pro pitchers have proven willing to take in the name of competition, acclaim and financial compensation.

considered too straight and too hittable got the last laugh. According to the MLB Statcast’s run-value metric, Greene’s dialed-back four-seam fastball was the most valuable in baseball. It topped all starting pitchers at 22.2 runs.

“In terms of the mechanics and how easy it is for him and how hard he can throw it,” Reds catcher Tyler Stephenson said, “(Greene) has one of the better fastballs in baseball for sure.”

The proof was in the pitches he threw in game-changing moments.

He reached back and froze Pirates DH Andrew McCutchen with a 100.1 mph fastball for the final out of the sixth inning of a scoreless game. He fired a 99.4 mph fastball for strike three in the seventh inning of a tie game versus the Dodgers to fan Enrique Hernandez. In a game against the Cardinals, Greene hit 99.3 mph in the seventh inning and got left fielder Brendan Donovan to strike out swinging.

“When he needs a pitch, he’s able to get (his velocity) there,” Johnson said. “To me, that’s a sign of what a good pitcher is.” ■

son, Greene threw 470 pitches at 100 mph or faster, the most among starting pitchers. Thirty-seven other starters in the sample had hit 100 mph at least once. Sixteen of them had reached 100 mph at least 10 times.

But only Greene and the Pirates’ Paul Skenes threw 100 or more pitches at 100 mph. Others might have joined them if not for injury. Jacob deGrom, Shohei Ohtani, Spencer Strider and Sandy Alcantara all had major elbow surgery, while Bobby Miller struggled to get established in the big leagues.

In 2024, even after Greene scaled his velocity

back a bit, Skenes was the only starter to throw more pitches at 100 mph or faster than Greene’s 35. Young flamethrowers Jose Soriano (32) and Jared Jones (30) were the only starters in the same neighborhood.

“Hunter’s athleticism has a lot to do with that,” Lodolo said. “You watch him play catch, and he’s very athletic. Maybe that goes back to him being a shortstop (in high school). He has a really good feel for the baseball and where his body is at. That translates to the mound and helps him a lot.”

In 2024 the pitcher whose fastball was once



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THE VELD CITY ISSUE

The incredible
Aroldis Chapman
stands alone for pure
velocity and durability

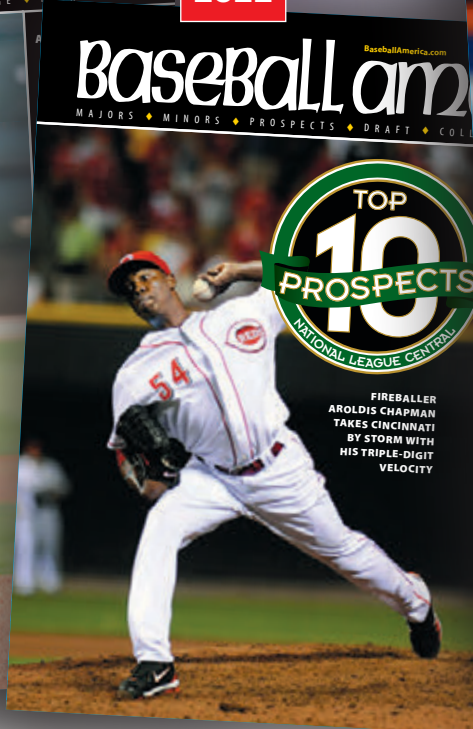
By J.J. COOPER

SPEED KING

2010



2011



2012



In his fourth appearance of the 2025 season, Red Sox lefthander Aroldis Chapman threw a 101.4 mph fastball. By his standards, that's not a particularly noteworthy achievement. At the time he threw it, the pitch was tied for the 31st fastest in the majors.

Chapman had thrown 1,497 pitches faster than that in his MLB career.

But the pitch extended a streak that seems hard to fathom. Chapman has now thrown a fastball 100 mph or harder in 16 consecutive seasons. Going back to his rookie year in 2010, Chapman has reached triple-digits each and every season. Fans today are watching one of the most remarkable and durable arms in history.

Throwing 100 mph is remarkable, though it feels more commonplace now than it did when Chapman amazed everyone with his exceptional velocity as a Reds rookie in 2010.

Throwing 100 mph year after year and staying healthy is something that just doesn't happen. Throwing 100 mph or harder is like asking a pitcher to hit their rev limiter. Most pitchers will eventually blow out.

In a 16-season MLB career, Chapman has had a broken eye socket due to a comebacker. He's missed time with a sore knee and another time with Achilles tendinitis. He even missed time with an infected tattoo. And in 2016 he was suspended for 30 games by MLB after an accusation of domestic violence.

But in 16 seasons, Chapman has spent 11 days on the injured list with a sore left elbow and a month on the IL another time with rotator cuff soreness. Those are the only times his arm or shoulder has balked at throwing pitch after pitch at velocities that make ulnar collateral ligaments shudder.

Other than the shortened 2020 season, Chapman has made at least 40 appearances in every year from 2011 to 2024. His 800-plus appearances are second most among active players, behind only active saves leader Kenley Jansen. Chapman was

closing in on the top 50 all time.

Chapman's 16 straight seasons with a 100 mph fastball is easily the record of the pitch-tracking era, which dates back to 2008. Such a streak requires a pitcher to never waver in his velocity and never miss a season with injury.

Chapman's 16 seasons with a 100 mph fastball are five more than any other pitcher. Nathan Eovaldi has thrown 100 in 10 seasons. But when it comes to a consecutive season streak, no one is even close.

Craig Kimbrel had eight straight seasons with a 100 mph fastball, but he last saw triple digits in 2018. As impressive as Kimbrel's streak is, it's a reminder of how hard it is to maintain this velocity for this long, even for a one-inning closer.

When Kimbrel's streak began in 2011, Chapman was already a year into his streak. Chapman has kept that up for another seven years since and has the potential to keep doing so for years to come.

Eovaldi may have 10 seasons with a 100 mph fastball, but there are gaps. Where Chapman has never been on the 60-day injured list, Eovaldi has been on the 60-day IL in five different seasons.

Eovaldi reached triple digits from 2018 to 2022, but he didn't get there in 2023, and he didn't in 2017 because he missed the entire season. He had another streak from 2013 to 2016, but he didn't in 2012 after reaching 100 mph in 2011.

Yankees righthander Gerrit Cole has nine 100 mph seasons, but he won't in 2025. He also didn't get to 100 in 2023, and he didn't in 2016, so his longest streak is six seasons, 2017 to 2022. He's been on the 60-day IL in three different seasons, including this one as he recovers from Tommy John surgery.

The longest active streak other than Chapman is six straight seasons, a mark currently held by Dodgers reliever Brusdar Graterol. Graterol had yet to throw 100 mph this year—he opened the season on the 60-day IL after having offseason shoulder surgery—but he did so from 2019 to 2024. Guardians closer Emmanuel Clase has a five-season active streak.

BEST FASTBALL

Three-year rolling winners in annual

BA Best Tools voting

- 1990** Roger Clemens
- 1991** Roger Clemens
- 1992** Roger Clemens
- 1993** Roger Clemens
- 1994** Roger Clemens
- 1995** Randy Johnson
- 1996** Randy Johnson
- 1997** Randy Johnson
- 1998** Randy Johnson
- 1999** Randy Johnson
- 2000** Randy Johnson
- 2001** Randy Johnson
- 2002** Randy Johnson
- 2003** Randy Johnson
- 2004** Randy Johnson
- 2005** Billy Wagner
- 2006** Billy Wagner
- 2007** Billy Wagner
- 2008** Billy Wagner
- 2009** Justin Verlander
- 2010** Justin Verlander
- 2011** Justin Verlander
- 2012** Justin Verlander
- 2013** Aroldis Chapman
- 2014** Aroldis Chapman
- 2015** Aroldis Chapman
- 2016** Aroldis Chapman
- 2017** Aroldis Chapman
- 2018** Aroldis Chapman
- 2019** Aroldis Chapman
- 2021** Aroldis Chapman
- 2022** Aroldis Chapman
- 2023** Zack Wheeler
- 2024** Zack Wheeler

THE VELD CITY ISSUE

CHAPMAN SETS FASTBALL VELOCITY MARK FOR RECORD SIXTH MLB TEAM

Hall of Famers Walter Johnson, Bob Feller and Nolan Ryan were regarded as the hardest throwers of their time, long before the days of omnipresent radar guns.

In the past 40 years, Roger Clemens, Randy Johnson, Pedro Martinez, Billy Wagner and Justin Verlander are the most decorated Best Fastball category winners in BA Best Tools voting.

But one man stands alone as baseball's speed king: Aroldis Chapman.

Chapman has thrown a pitch faster than 100 mph in 16 straight seasons, a record for the pitch-tracking era. His 98.9 mph average fastball velocity is the fastest among pitchers with at least 500 career innings since 2002, the first year for which velocity data is available at FanGraphs.

Chapman combines extreme heat with extreme durability in measures that even past flame-throwing closers such as Goose Gossage, Wagner or contemporary Craig Kimbrel could not surpass.

Remarkably, the 37-year-old Chapman is still at it this season as the primary closer for the Red Sox. Recently, he extended a record that is likely to be unbreakable.

By throwing a 102.3 mph fastball on April 19, Chapman set the standard for fastest documented fastball thrown by a Red Sox pitcher. (He later upped the ante to 103.4 mph on April 26.) Now, he has thrown the fastest pitch for six different MLB teams since the advent of Pitch f/x tracking technology in 2008.

No other pitcher owns the velocity record for more than two teams. Active pitchers Jordan Hicks and Andres Muñoz are still in their primes and can't be ruled out entirely as challengers, but they need to continue at their current pace of dominance and durability for years to come.

In succession, Chapman threw the fastest fastball for the Reds, Yankees, Cubs, Royals, Pirates and Red Sox. He has set the speed standard for every team for which he has played—except for the Rangers.

Former closer Neftali Feliz holds the Texas franchise record for peak velocity. He threw a pitch tracked at 104.1 mph in 2010, his American League Rookie of the Year season.

The top mark Chapman registered for Texas was 101.7 mph. But to be fair, he spent only June, July, August and September of 2023 with the Rangers following a trade from the Royals. In the 2023 postseason, Chapman hit 101.5 mph for the World Series-champion Rangers.

At right, you can see the peak velocity leaders for all 30 MLB teams, as sourced from Baseball Savant's MLB Statcast search tool.

—Matt Eddy and J.J. Cooper



To break Chapman's streak, Graterol would have to touch 100 mph every year from this one to 2034—but that's only if Chapman's streak ends this year.

But even if Graterol manages to somehow do that, that wouldn't match Chapman's ability to maintain top-end velocity.

That's because setting the bar at 100 mph is actually selling Chapman short.

Chapman has also touched 101 mph for 16 straight seasons. Trevor Rosenthal, Andres

Muñoz, Ryan Helsley and Jose Alvarado are tied for second most with six seasons with 101 mph or faster pitches. Muñoz, Helsley and Alvarado all have five-year active streaks.

Chapman's streak of seasons with a 102 mph fastball stretched for "just" 11 seasons, from 2010 to 2021. He failed to touch 102 mph in 2022, but he did get there in 2023, 2024 and 2025.

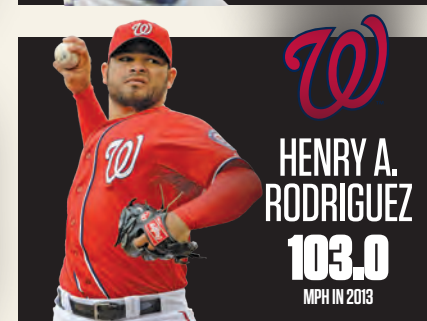
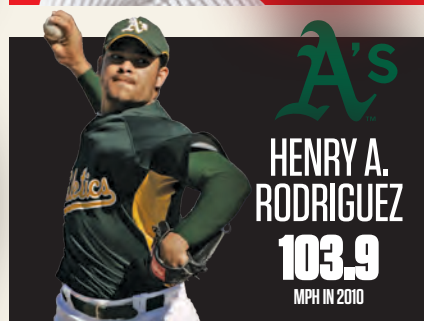
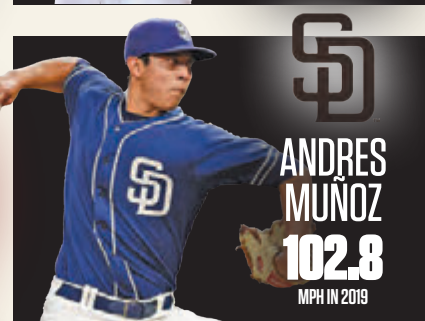
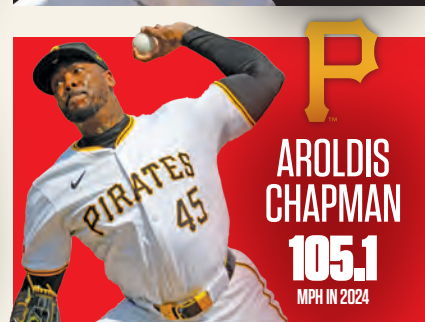
Chapman has 14 seasons with a 102 mph fastball. No other pitcher has more than Jordan Hicks' five seasons. Clase and Camilo Doval's

four consecutive seasons with a 102 mph pitch are the longest current active streaks.

Chapman also has 13 different seasons where he's thrown 103 mph or harder, including a nine-year streak from 2010 to 2018, and he did so in 2023 and 2024.

Hicks (five seasons), Jhoan Duran (three), Helsley (three) and Ben Joyce (three) are the only other pitchers with a 103 mph fastball or harder in more than two seasons in the pitch-tracking era.

Chapman has turned the heat up to 104 mph



in nine different seasons, with a six-year streak from 2013 to 2018. In the entire MLB pitcher universe, just eight others have thrown 104 mph once in a game in the pitch-tracking era, and only Hicks (2018, 2019 and 2023) has ever done so in more than one season.

It is only at 105 mph that we find a velocity that Chapman hasn't been able to reach in back-to-back seasons. He did so once in 2010, seven times in 2016 and once in 2024, but that's it.

Of course, that puts him in a realm all his own.

Hicks had two 105 mph pitches in 2018, and Ben Joyce reached that threshold for one pitch in 2024. Those are the only other 105 mph pitches in MLB Statcast history.

Chapman has thrown 48.8% of all 103, 104 and 105 mph pitches in the pitch-tracking era. He's thrown more than twice as many 99, 100, 101 and 102 mph pitches as any other MLB pitcher since 2008, and he's thrown more 97 and 98 mph pitches than any other pitcher as well.

You have to lower the bar to 96 mph to find a

velocity where another pitcher has thrown more pitches at that velocity than Chapman. That's where Cole reigns supreme, which is amazing considering that he is a starting pitcher.

But that's only because Chapman rarely throws a fastball slower than 97 mph. Of his 9,791 fastballs in his career, just 753 did not touch 97.

Some pitchers have approximated Chapman's velocity for a short time, but when it comes to sustained exceptional velocity, he's the best the game has seen since Nolan Ryan. ■

THE VELD CITY ISSUE

FAST COMPANY

Tennessee has produced its share of hard-throwers. Enter Liam Doyle and 'the best fastball in the country.'

by JOSH NORRIS

Tennessee's baseball team is firmly among the NCAA elite. The Volunteers are the reigning national champions and have produced six first-round picks in the last five drafts.

Tennessee ranked No. 2 in the nation at midseason and it has three more players poised to be first-rounders in July: lefthander Liam Doyle, shortstop Dean Curley and second baseman Gavin Kilen.

To cook consistently at this level requires plenty of heat, and the Vols have one of the most reliable pipelines of premium velocity in the nation.

The list of flamethrowers who spent time in Knoxville over the past half decade is extraordinary. Angels reliever Ben Joyce is one of three pitchers in MLB history to throw 105 mph, and his 105.5 mph fastball last September was the hardest pitch ever that resulted in a strikeout.

Rockies righthander Chase Dollander made his big league debut in April and was averaging 97.5 mph with his heater. Reds prospect Chase Burns—who spent his first two seasons at Tennessee before transferring to Wake Forest—brought his fastball up to 102 mph this spring.

Red Sox ace Garrett Crochet—a first-round pick of the White Sox in 2020—averages nearly 96 mph, making him one of the hardest-throwing lefthanded starters.

This year alone, the Vols have three pitchers whose fastballs have touched 100 mph or faster: Saturday starter Marcus Phillips and relievers Tanner Franklin and Nate Sneed.

And then there's Liam Doyle.

The lefthander's fastball hasn't quite gotten to triple digits this season—his best bolt is a "mere" 99 mph—but it remains one of the best pitches of its kind found anywhere across the country.

What makes Doyle's fastball so special? Let him explain.

"There's a few pitchers out there who have better vertical fastballs than





After transferring to Tennessee, Liam Doyle upgraded his secondary pitches to pair with his elite fastball.

BRIAN WESTERHOLT/FOUR SEAM IMAGES (DOYLE), DANNY PARKER/FOUR SEAM IMAGES (CROCHET)

me, but I throw mine with conviction, I get good ride on mine and I throw from a different arm slot,” Doyle said.

“I’m a lefty, so it’s kind of funky for a lot of people to see, and it just comes off my hand differently than a lot of other pitchers throw.

“So, you know, I think it’s the best fastball in the country.” The results certainly back up Doyle’s assertion.

Doyle throws the pitch—which averages 95.9 mph—69% of the time, to impressive results. Through April 14, he had thrown 588 fastballs and had thoroughly neutralized hitters. They hit just .139/.250/.235 in at-bats ending with a fastball. Sixty-nine of his NCAA-leading 95 strikeouts this season were finished with fastballs.

Tennessee pitching coach Frank Anderson has been with the Volunteers since 2017 and has been coaching since 1984, when he joined his alma mater Emporia State (Kan.) as an assistant. In that time, he’s seen a great number of impressive fastballs.

Asked if Doyle’s heater matched up with any he’s seen in his decades in the game, Anderson didn’t have to go deep into his memory banks.

“It probably compares to Dollander’s,” Anderson said, “because his sophomore year here, his was special, just like (Doyle’s), where you could know he was throwing a fastball and still have a hard time catching up and putting it in play.

“I mean, I saw (Dollander) beat Dylan Crews in a conference tournament where we all knew what was coming—and so did he—and he just threw it by him. I think the next at-bat he probably doubled off of him or something, but the first at-bat, that was hard to do with those types of guys.”

In his draft year at Tennessee, Dollander threw his fastball 65% of the time, and the pitch averaged 95.7 mph. Doyle throws his fastball with a touch more velocity and a bit more often, but the life on both pitches is similar.

“The ride on those two guys’ fastballs is very comparable,” Anderson said. “Crochet had more lateral movement, and Burns, he had some ride, but not like these two (Doyle and Dollander).”

When MLB commissioner Rob Manfred calls Doyle’s name at the 2025 draft, he’ll announce him as a lefthanded pitcher from the University of Tennessee. That’s only part of the story. A third of it, in fact.

Upon graduating from high school in New Hampshire, Doyle began his college career at Coastal Carolina. After striking out 69 hitters in 56.1 innings with the Chanticleers, Doyle moved to Ole Miss for his sophomore year. His work in Oxford caught the attention of the staff at Tennessee, which added him to a roster of a team with an eye on a second straight national title.

With six weeks left in the regular season, Doyle has already gone 11 strikeouts past his total from his previous high-water mark of 84 from a season ago at Mississippi, when he went 3–4, 5.73 and allowed nearly two home runs per nine innings.

Now, Doyle’s strikeouts are up, his hits and walks are down and he’s done a much better job keeping the ball in the park—no small feat in this era of college baseball.

So, what changed? A lot, including some more velocity behind his mix.

“My offspeed pitches are different than last year,” Doyle said. “My fastball stayed the same—we haven’t touched it. I’ve always had a pretty good fastball, but my slider grip is a

TAKING A LEFT TURN

Tennessee southpaw **Liam Doyle** is a strong contender to be designated as having the best fastball among this year’s draft-eligible college pitchers.

Doyle follows Arkansas’ **Hagen Smith** in 2024, Tennessee’s **Garrett Crochet** in 2020 and South Florida’s **Shane McClanahan** in 2018 as recent lefthanders who stood out in their respective draft classes for the power and effectiveness of their fastballs.

Prior to Smith, Crochet and McClanahan, the last college lefty to claim the best fastball category in annual Baseball America best tools polling for the draft was **Billy Wagner** in 1993.

Wagner starred for Division III Ferrum College in Virginia. He was such a sensation with his mid-90s heat that despite his listed 5-foot-10 height, low caliber of college competition and lack of a consistent second pitch, the Astros made him the 12th pick in the 1993 draft. He was a big leaguer two years later.

The track record for college lefties with elite fastballs is quite strong. Wagner will be enshrined in the Hall of Fame this summer, while Crochet and McClanahan have No. 1 starter-caliber skills. In addition to the category winners, Vanderbilt’s **David Price** finished runner-up in 2007 and Florida Gulf Coast’s **Chris Sale** third in 2010.



little bit different. I throw it a little bit harder, and I’m trying to throw it more like my fastball.

“The problem with it last year was that my arm slot was a little bit different, so hitters would pick up on it quicker. It was a pretty good pitch still, but it just came from a different arm slot, so hitters would be able to pick up on it quicker.

“And then my split is more like a split-changeup grip than a true splitter.”

Doyle’s changeup overhaul has shown in a variety of ways. The grip is different, which is an alteration designed to make the pitch leave Doyle’s hand in a way that more closely mirrors his wicked fastball. His changeup is harder, too, sitting around 86 mph and peaking a few ticks hotter. The changeup he threw in 2024 averaged roughly 80 mph and peaked at 85.

About the only pitch Doyle didn’t revamp was his fastball. And why would he? Even when his surface numbers weren’t pristine, his fastball was earning rave reviews.

When he faced Tennessee in 2024 as a member of Ole Miss, Doyle grabbed the attention of Christian Moore, one of the best hitters in the nation that year and a first-rounder. Doyle threw Moore eight fastballs that afternoon and got Moore to swing through five of them. Two of those whiffs resulted in strikeouts.

Doyle was one of just two pitchers in the country that season to get Moore to strike out multiple times on fastballs.

As the 2025 draft looms, Doyle has used an amplified arsenal and a reshaped body to turn in the best results of his life. And when he takes the hill for the first time in a minor league game, he’ll add his name to a scintillating list of Volunteers who have parlayed exemplary fastballs into professional careers. ■

THE VELD CITY ISSUE

LEFT TURN

Up to 100 mph, Jack Bauer enters rare velocity range for prep lefthanders

by CARLOS COLLAZO

Back in September 2023, at Prep Baseball Report's inaugural All-American Game in Milwaukee, scouts were mostly focused on the 2024 high school class. The game pitted some of the top preps from the class of 2024 against some of the best 2025-eligibles.

One of those 2025s was Illinois lefthander Jack Bauer.

Two summers away from his own draft, the lanky southpaw worked a quick four-batter inning in which generated swings and misses with a 92-95 mph fastball. He also threw a slider and changeup.

He got a pair of ground outs, walked a batter and struck out righthanded-hitting Griffin Burkholder—who went on to sign for \$2.5 million in the second round with the Phillies—with an 83 mph changeup.

A year later, during Bauer's time to shine on the showcase circuit, he continued to show loud stuff, but he struggled with his control. He was one of just two lefthanders to touch at least 95 mph at Perfect Game's National showcase—along with Kruz Schoolcraft—and one of just four players at the event to throw a breaking pitch with a spin rate north of 3,000 rpm—along with righthanders Reid Worley and Stephen Christopher and

lefthander Patrick Dudley.

Bauer's pure stuff, physical projection and handedness made him an intriguing prospect. However, his scattered control on the 2024 circuit—with every scout in the country bearing down on him—capped him at No. 155 on our preseason top 200 list for 2025.

At four Synergy Sports-logged events from June through August, Bauer walked 16 batters and struck out 11 of the 43 batters he faced. He also threw each of his pitch types for strikes less than half the time.

Then, on our first in-season update of the season, Bauer was one of the most notable up-arrow players in the 2025 draft class. He jumped more than two rounds, all the way up to No. 68, and is solidly in play in the first two

rounds this July.

That ascension is almost entirely driven by his newfound velocity. After topping out around 95 mph last summer, Bauer early this spring had touched 100. While he has pitched only in a handful of abbreviated outings for Lincoln-Way East High, scouts have reported a prep lefthander who is now sitting around 96 mph.

That's a significant jump in velocity, and it's also come with shockingly little effort in his delivery.

From conversations with scouts in reporting on Bauer's newfound top-end power and generally "loud stuff" profile, I've likened him to former power-over-finesse prep lefthanders Maddux Bruns and Alex Clemmey, without much pushback.

Bruns was the 29th overall pick by the Dodgers in 2021 and Clemmey was the 59th overall pick by the Guardians in 2023. Both lefties touched 98 mph as preps and both signed for more than \$2 million. Both pitchers had repertoires that featured 70-grade fastball projections with secondaries that flashed or were consistently plus or better at the time. They both also had track records of spotty control.

But even Bauer’s new top-round talent designation could be light for some scouts. After all, it’s difficult to find a high school lefthander who has touched triple-digit velocity in recent seasons, let alone one who can do it while also boasting innate feel to spin a breaking ball in the 3,000 rpm range.

In an attempt to contextualize just how rare Bauer’s 100 mph radar gun reading is for high school lefties, I examined the scouting reports of every BA 500-ranked lefthander from the 2018 through 2024 draft classes. Where applicable, I also cross-referenced that list of players with high school pitching data from Synergy Sports to find each player’s max known fastball velocity.

Of that group of players, including Bauer, there were 15 lefties who touched at least 97 mph. But Bauer appears to stand alone in the prep lefty triple-digit club:

VERIFIED HEAT

Hardest-Throwing High School Lefthanders
Confirmed Peak Velocity 2018-2025

Year	Player	State	Rank	Max FB Velo
2025	Jack Bauer	IL	68	100
2022	Brandon Barriera	FL	17	99
2024	Cam Caminiti	AZ	21	98
2023	Cameron Johnson	FL	43	98
2023	Alex Clemmey	RI	49	98
2022	Noah Schultz	IL	51	98
2024	Kash Mayfield	OK	25	97
2023	Thomas White	MA	19	97
2023	Paul Wilson	OR	51	97
2022	Robby Snelling	NV	21	97
2022	Jackson Ferris	FL	34	97
2021	Maddux Bruns	AL	48	97
2021	Jac Caglianone	FL	122	97
2021	Brandon Clarke	VA	233	97
2020	Ronan Kopp	AZ	270	97

This methodology isn’t an exact science. It’s certainly possible that some pitchers have hit higher fastball marks than their listed velocities, either in bullpen sessions or non-scouted outings that go unrecorded.

We don’t have the same precise data for high school players around the country that we do for pros. Even Clemmey mentioned having touched 100 mph in high school, though that’s two ticks higher than Baseball America ever



Illinois high school lefthander Jack Bauer has incomparable velocity and strong slider characteristics.

heard at the time. So while it’s impossible to say definitively that Bauer is the hardest-throwing high school lefthander, he’s certainly one of the hardest-throwing high school lefthanders.

In the section labeled Power Lefties, we sort the top velocities mentioned in draft reports for all high school lefthanders drafted in the first round since 2000. Three names from the 1990s also bear mentioning:

■ Brien Taylor reached the upper 90s with his fastball and was the No. 1 pick in the 1991 draft by the Yankees. He was the No. 2 overall prospect a year later, before a shoulder injury short-circuited his career.

■ Ryan Anderson drew comparisons with Randy Johnson for his 6-foot-10 frame and extreme velocity. The Mariners drafted him 19th overall in 1997. Three times Anderson ranked as a top 10 overall prospect in baseball, but he never reached the majors.

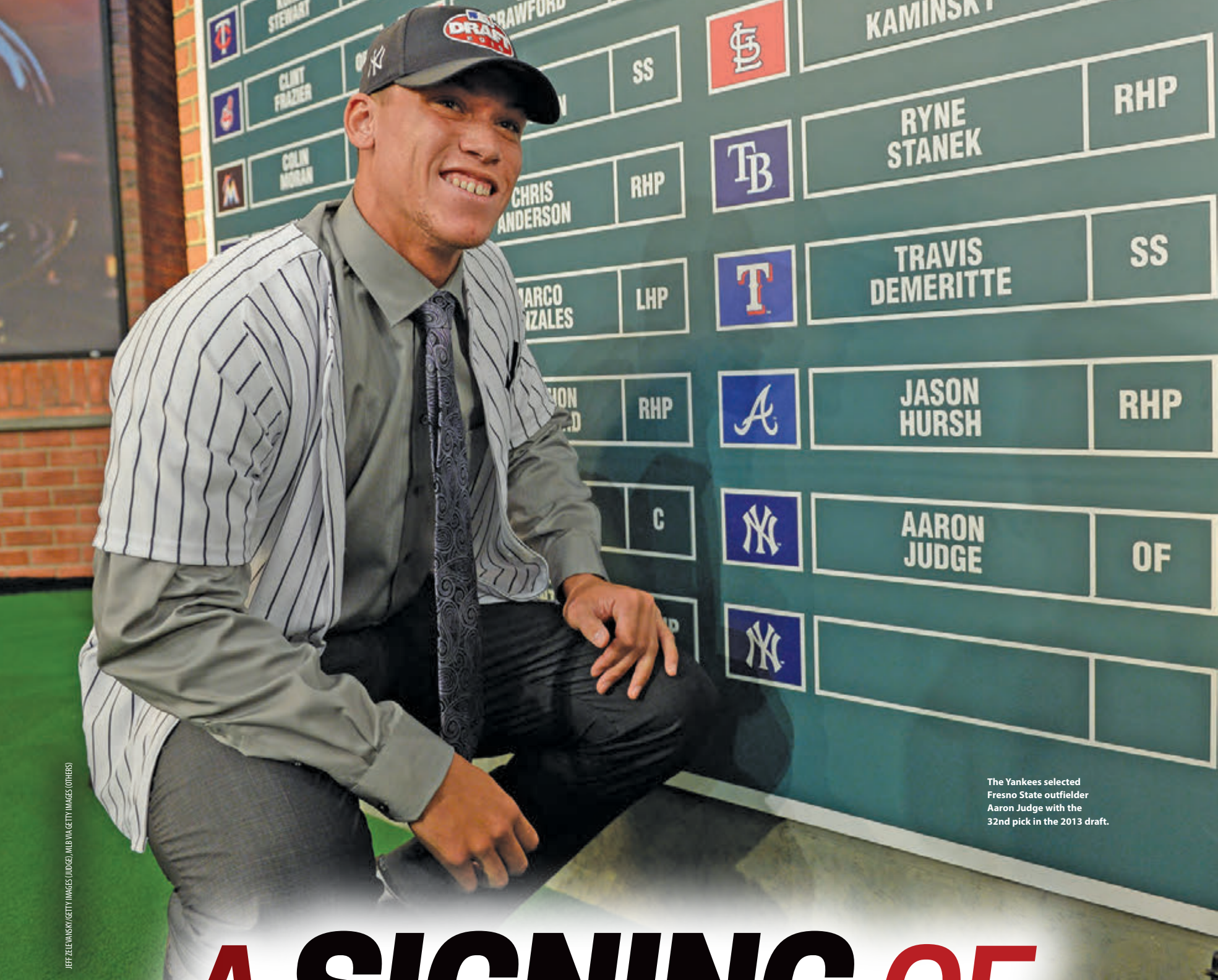
■ CC Sabathia touched 98 mph at Vallejo High in California. The Indians drafted him 20th overall in 1998. This year, he will be enshrined in the Hall of Fame. ■

POWER LEFTIES

Highest Velocity Cited In BA Draft Report
First-Round High School Lefthanders 2000-2024

Year	Pick	Pitcher	Max FB Velo
2022	23	Brandon Barriera	99
2024	24	Cam Caminiti*	98
2022	26	Noah Schultz	98
2021	29	Maddux Bruns	98
2024	25	Kash Mayfield	97
2016	12	Jay Groome	97
2015	17	Brady Aiken	97
2014	1	Brady Aiken	97
2007	10	Madison Bumgarner	97
2018	16	Matthew Liberatore	96
2017	3	MacKenzie Gore	96
2017	21	DL Hall	96
2015	14	Kolby Allard	96
2006	7	Clayton Kershaw*	96
2002	15	Scott Kazmir	96
2001	24	Macay McBride	96
2018	7	Ryan Weathers	95
2017	13	Trevor Rogers	95
2014	12	Kodi Medeiros	95
2012	7	Max Fried	95
2011	33	Kevin Matthews	95
2009	14	Matt Purke	95
2009	18	Chad James	95
2005	20	Mark Pawelek	95
2000	9	Mark Phillips	95
2014	28	Foster Griffin	94
2014	31	Justus Sheffield	94
2013	7	Trey Ball	94
2013	28	Rob Kaminsky	94
2013	33	Ian Clarkin	94
2010	27	Jesse Biddle	94
2009	11	Tyler Matzek	94
2003	9	John Danks	94
2002	4	Adam Loewen	94
2002	17	Cole Hamels	94
2001	20	Jeremy Sowers	94
2000	10	Joe Torres	94
2021	7	Frank Mozzicato	93
2016	30	Cole Ragans	93
2006	12	Kasey Kiker	93
2004	17	Scott Elbert	93
2000	4	Mike Stodolka	93
2005	22	Aaron Thompson	91
2019	26	Blake Walston	“Low 90s”
2016	7	Braxton Garrett	“Low 90s”
2002	31	Greg Miller	“Low 90s”
2000	19	Sean Burnett	“High 80s”

* Cam Caminiti (2024) and Clayton Kershaw (2006) were the rare high school lefthanders to be singled out by scouts as having the best fastball in their draft classes in Best Tools voting. The same was true for Brien Taylor (1991) and Ryan Anderson (1997).



The Yankees selected Fresno State outfielder Aaron Judge with the 32nd pick in the 2013 draft.

A SIGNING OF THINGS TO COME

The best player signed by each organization since 2000

by MATT EDDY

When the Dodgers defeated the Yankees in the 2024 World Series, it marked the end of the 25th season since the dawn of the year 2000. We thought the proper Baseball America way to commemorate the quarter century was to review the best player originally signed by each organization since the calendar flipped to the new millennium.

Any signing method is valid, so long as it is the player's initial contract with an MLB organization. This includes

draft picks, international amateurs and foreign professionals with years of NPB superstardom. Major league free agent signings are excluded.

But we couldn't stop at one. For each of the 30 organizations, we round out Mount Rushmore with three additional high-value signees.

Note that the operative word for this exercise is *sign*. Had we drawn the line at 1999, then Albert Pujols and Miguel Cabrera would take center stage.



Scan the QR code to see hundreds of additional notable signees



ARIZONA
DIAMONDBACKS

MAX
SCHERZER

RHP



It took time, but Scherzer completely and thoroughly dispelled talk of reliever risk that dogged him in the 2006 draft. Arizona got a bargain when it drafted Scherzer 11th overall out of Missouri, but the D-backs should have stuck to their guns rather than trade him for Ian Kennedy and Edwin Jackson following the 2009 season. Scherzer ascended to ace status in Detroit, winning the 2013 American League Cy Young Award and then notching two more in the NL with the Nationals after he signed perhaps the best free agent deal ever for a pitcher. Scherzer has accomplished everything in his career: World Series rings with the 2019 Nationals and 2023 Rangers, three Cy Young Awards, two no-hitters, 3,000 career strikeouts and a 20-strikeout game.

Bottom Line: 75 WAR | 3x Cy Young | 8x All-Star | 2x World Series

Rounding Out Mount Rushmore:

Paul Goldschmidt, 1B; Justin Upton, OF; Brandon Webb, RHP

Primetime Players: Right fielder Corbin Carroll won NL Rookie of the Year in 2023, when he helped key the D-backs to the World Series. Arizona is the original signing organization for Gold Glovers Dansby Swanson and Daulton Varsho as well.



ATLANTA
BRAVES

FREDDIE
FREEMAN

1B



Freeman stands tall in a Braves organization with an abundance of big-ticket signees. He starred as a two-way player at his SoCal high school when Atlanta made him a second-round pick in 2007. The Braves made a wise choice by committing to him as a first baseman. Freeman starred in the 2010s and has cemented his legacy in the 2020s with a National League MVP award in 2020 and World Series rings with the 2021 Braves and 2024 Dodgers. The future Hall of Famer is five good seasons away from 3,000 hits and 450 home runs, if he can stay healthy into his late 30s.

Bottom Line: 61 WAR | 2020 NL MVP | 2x World Series | 8x All-Star | 1x Gold Glove | 3x Silver Slugger

Rounding Out Mount Rushmore: Brian McCann, C; Adam Wainwright, RHP; Ronald Acuña Jr., OF

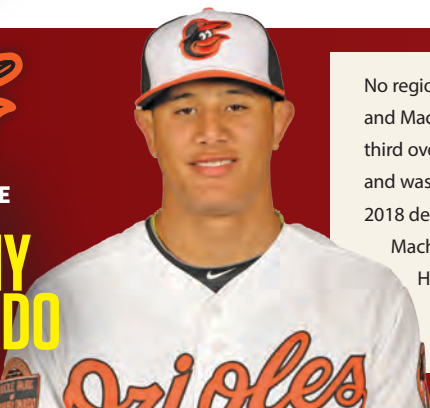
Primetime Players: The 2025 Braves' lineup is stuffed with homegrown stars in their primes—third baseman Austin Riley, righthander Spencer Strider, second baseman Ozzie Albies and center fielder Michael Harris II—while 2024 rookie righthander Spencer Schwellenbach could be next. Oh, and the Brewers' William Contreras, another Braves signee, might be the best catcher in baseball.



BALTIMORE
ORIOLES

MANNY
MACHADO

3B



No region produces more professional baseball players per capita than South Florida, and Machado is one of the brightest stars from the Sunshine State this century. Drafted third overall in 2010, Machado made his MLB debut as a 20-year-old two years later and was an instant success. He elevated his Orioles clubs for seven seasons before his 2018 departure triggered a full rebuild in Baltimore. When he joined the Padres in 2019, Machado was the first North American professional athlete to sign for \$300 million.

He has remained highly productive into his 30s and will make a run at 500 home runs and the Hall of Fame before he's done.

Bottom Line: 58 WAR | 6x All-Star | 2x Gold Glove | 2x Silver Slugger

Rounding Out Mount Rushmore:

Kevin Gausman, RHP; Nick Markakis, OF; Jake Arrieta, RHP

Primetime Players: Mike Elias hit paydirt with his first two draft picks for the Orioles in 2019: Oregon State catcher Adley Rutschman with the first overall pick and Alabama prep shortstop Gunnar Henderson with the first pick in the second round. Both are already two of the best players in franchise history.



BOSTON
RED SOX

MOOKIE
BETTS

RF



Betts represents the best \$750,000 the Red Sox ever spent. Boston drafted him out of Nashville's Overton High in the fifth round in 2011 and bought him out of a Tennessee commitment. Three years later, he was patrolling the outfield at Fenway. Betts was the American League MVP in 2018 as he helped the Red Sox cruise to 108 wins, an 11-3 postseason run and a World Series championship. Trading Betts after the 2019 season proved to be a disaster for Boston—but not for Betts. He continued to thrive with the Dodgers, adding two more World Series rings in 2020 and 2024.

Bottom Line: 70 WAR | 2018 AL MVP | 3x World Series | 8x All-Star | 6x Gold Glove | 7x Silver Slugger

Rounding Out Mount Rushmore:

Jon Lester, LHP; Dustin Pedroia, 2B; Xander Bogaerts, SS

Primetime Players: Third baseman Rafael Devers and center fielder Jarren Duran are key players for the 2025 team and are in their primes. Fenway Park can be unforgiving for lefthanded sluggers, but Devers already ranks top five in franchise history for home runs by a lefthanded hitter.



CHICAGO
CUBS

JOSH
DONALDSON

3B



For all the Cubs' draft success under Theo Epstein, including first-rounders Kris Bryant, Kyle Schwarber and Ian Happ, it was a Jim Hendry pick who was most productive. A Hendry pick who never played a single game for the Cubs, no less. Chicago drafted Donaldson as a catcher out of Auburn in the supplemental first round in 2007 and, one year later, traded him to the Athletics as part of a prospect package for Rich Harden. Donaldson remained behind the plate until 2012, when he began playing more third base than any other position. Making the switch unlocked his offensive potential. Beginning at age 27, he embarked on a 10-year run as a regular for the A's, Blue Jays, Guardians, Braves, Twins and Yankees. Donaldson was at his best during his MVP season of 2015, when he hit 41 homers and led the AL in runs scored and RBIs for a high-powered Toronto team.

Bottom Line: 47 WAR | 2015 AL MVP | 3x All-Star | 2x Silver Slugger

Rounding Out Mount

Rushmore: Kris Bryant, 3B; DJ LeMahieu, 2B; Willson Contreras, C

Primetime Players: The Cubs drafted Justin Steele and Dylan Cease out of high school in the fifth and sixth rounds in 2014.

Sale's slender frame, lower arm slot and mid-major pedigree scared off some teams in the 2010 draft—but not the White Sox. Chicago got the steal of the first round when it selected the Florida Gulf Coast southpaw 13th overall. Sale reached the big leagues that August, after just 10 minor league innings, and never looked back. He and Jacob deGrom have battled back and forth for the title of preeminent strikeout artist of the century. In terms of WAR, Sale pulled ahead with a Cy Young Award season in 2024. He also has a signature moment: He struck out Manny Machado to end the 2018 World Series and deliver the title to Boston.

Bottom Line: 53 WAR | 2024 NL Cy Young | 1x World Series | 8x All-Star | 1x Gold Glove

Rounding Out Mount Rushmore: Marcus Semien, SS; Gio Gonzalez, LHP; Jose Abreu, 1B

Primetime Players: Even on a 121-loss roster in 2024, the White Sox had bright spots. Lefthander Garrett Crochet pitched like an ace and fetched a prospect haul from the Red Sox. Center fielder Luis Robert Jr. has flashed five-tool upside when healthy. The White Sox also originally signed Fernando Tatis Jr. before trading him to the Padres for James Shields in 2016.



For many players singled out in this exercise, their success was immediate in pro ball and almost preordained. That is not the case with Votto, whom the Reds drafted as a catcher out of his Toronto high school in the second round in 2002. He developed slowly but steadily in the minor leagues before becoming a big league regular in his seventh pro season. Once Votto reached MLB, he was an instant success. He finished runner-up for the 2008 National League Rookie of the Year and won the 2010 MVP. Votto spent his entire MLB career with the Reds, leading the NL seven times in on-base percentage and placing a stranglehold on the Best Strike-Zone Judgment category in annual Best Tools voting. He won it eight times.

Bottom Line: 65 WAR | 2010 NL MVP | 6x All-Star | 1x Gold Glove

Rounding Out Mount Rushmore: Justin Turner, 3B; Johnny Cueto, RHP; Aroldis Chapman, LHP

Primetime Players: The Reds' MLB roster is lousy with first-round picks—Tyler Stephenson, Nick Lodolo, Matt McLain, Rhett Lowder—but it is flame-throwing 2017 first-round righthander Hunter Greene and Dominican shortstop sensation Elly De La Cruz who are the most electrifying these days.



Lindor and Jose Ramirez are two of the best position players of this century, and they teamed up for six seasons in Cleveland. They were so good in 2016 that they nearly helped end what stands as the longest active World Series drought, when the Guardians pushed the Cubs to seven games. Cleveland drafted Lindor eighth overall in 2011 and retained him for 10 pro seasons before trading him to the Mets in 2021 as he neared free agency. Lindor has continued doing Lindor things in Queens. He hits for power, gets on base, steals bases and is one of the most reliable shortstop defenders ever.

Bottom Line: 50 WAR | 4x All-Star | 2x Gold Glove | 4x Silver Slugger

Rounding Out Mount Rushmore: Jose Ramirez, 3B; Shane Bieber, RHP; Jason Kipnis, 2B

Primetime Players: The Guardians are such active traders that their top MLB performers tend to be a mix of acquired—think Emmanuel Clase, Andres Gimenez and Josh Naylor on the 2024 team—and homegrown players. Two of their better homegrown players are Gold Glove left fielder Steven Kwan and righthander Tanner Bibee.



Arenado played shortstop at El Toro High—the same SoCal program that later produced Matt Chapman and Paul Skenes—but was viewed as more of a third baseman or possible catcher in pro ball. The Rockies got one of the steals of a loaded 2009 draft when they took Arenado in the second round. Skepticism around Arenado's defensive value continued to dog him in pro ball, but he dedicated himself to agility and quickness at High-A in 2011 and, well, the rest is history. He won a Gold Glove at third base in each of his first 10 big league seasons. Now in the decline phase of his career with the Cardinals, Arenado has built a résumé as one of the finest players at the hot corner this century with a rare blend of power and defensive excellence.

Bottom Line: 57 WAR | 8x All-Star | 10x Gold Glove | 5x Silver Slugger

Rounding Out Mount Rushmore:

Matt Holliday, OF; Troy Tulowitzki, SS; Ubaldo Jimenez, RHP

Primetime Players: Shortstop Ezequiel Tovar and center fielder Brenton Doyle are quality young hitters and standout defensive players—with the Gold Gloves to prove it. Chase Dollander and Charlie Condon represent the next wave.



Verlander is the most accomplished pitcher signed since 2000. Not bad for a kid from rural Virginia who dominated Colonial Athletic Association competition at Old Dominion. Verlander immediately attracted attention in college because he threw *really* hard, and the Tigers were the ultimate beneficiaries when they drafted him No. 2 overall in 2004. The Padres passed at No. 1 to draft local product Matt Bush. Verlander took immediately to pro ball, posting a 1.29 ERA over 119 innings in his only minor league season and then winning American League Rookie of the Year in 2006. He won Cy Young Awards in 2011 with the Tigers and 2019 and 2022 with the Astros. He picked up World Series rings with Houston in 2017 and 2022.

Bottom Line: 81 WAR | 2011 AL MVP | 3x AL Cy Young | 2x World Series | 9x All-Star

Rounding Out Mount Rushmore:

Curtis Granderson, OF; Rick Porcello, RHP; Willy Adames, SS

Primetime Players: Baseball America proclaimed Riley Greene and Spencer Torkelson to be "Tiger Kings" on our 2022 MLB Preview cover. Greene is the real deal, as is reigning Cy Young Award-winning lefthander Tarik Skubal.




HOUSTON
ASTROS
**JOSE
ALTUVE**
2B



A good story arc requires conflict. Altuve faced conflict—and skepticism—like few other performing prospects. That's because he stands 5-foot-6 and even in his youth did not *look* like a premium athlete. But all Altuve has done as a professional is prove doubters wrong. He hit .389 in the minor leagues in 2011 then made the all-star team as a 22-year-old in 2012, his first full big league season. An MVP award followed in 2017 as he helped key the Astros to the franchise's first World Series championship. In addition to his regular-season achievements—including three AL batting titles—Altuve is one of the most accomplished postseason performers in history. Only Manny Ramirez has more postseason home runs, while only Derek Jeter has scored more runs. When all is said and done, Altuve could be regarded as the best second baseman of the 21st century.

Bottom Line: 53 WAR | 2017 AL MVP | 2x World Series | 9x All-Star | 1x Gold Glove | 7x Silver Slugger

Rounding Out Mount

Rushmore: Alex Bregman, 3B; Carlos Correa, SS; Ben Zobrist, 2B
Primetime Players: Houston got out in front of free agency by trading Kyle Tucker to the Cubs. Lefthander Framber Valdez can also reach free agency after the 2025 season.


KANSAS CITY
ROYALS
**ZACK
GREINKE**
RHP



Baseball is a game of adjustments. Few players exemplify the expression quite like Greinke. Drafted out of high school sixth overall in 2002, he sped to Kansas City to make his MLB debut as a 20-year-old in 2004. After being roughed up by big league hitters in 2005, Greinke nearly gave up baseball the following spring. Learning to adapt to MLB life with social anxiety required an adjustment. He made further alterations to his repertoire throughout the years, becoming a slider-dominant pitcher when he won the 2009 American League Cy Young Award with the Royals. He leaned on his changeup in his mid 30s with the Astros as his fastball lost zip. One of the more athletic pitchers of his time, Greinke was also an excellent fielder, baserunner and hitter (for a pitcher).

Bottom Line: 78 WAR | 2009 AL Cy Young | 6x All-Star | 6x Gold Glove | 2x Silver Slugger

Rounding Out Mount

Rushmore: Alex Gordon, OF; Bobby Witt Jr., SS; Salvador Perez, C
Primetime Players: In addition to perennial MVP candidate Witt, first baseman Vinnie Pasquantino is the best homegrown Royals player still in his prime.


LOS ANGELES
ANGELS
**MIKE
TROUT**
CF



Viewed skeptically because he was a cold-weather prospect who played for a small New Jersey high school, Trout fell to 25th in the 2009 draft. He hit .360 in Rookie ball, was BA Minor League Player of the Year in 2011 and then AL Rookie of the Year in 2012 as a 20-year-old. Trout's ascent coincided with the rise of WAR as a player valuation metric, and he was a living embodiment of what it measured. He hit for average. He drew walks. He hit for power. He ran the bases expertly and played an above-average center field. WAR viewed Trout as being worth 72 wins in his first nine MLB seasons, more than any hitter ever except Ted Williams or Albert Pujols. The pandemic robbed Trout of about 100 games in 2020, when he was 28, while a series of injuries limited him to an average of 67 games from 2021 to 2024.

Bottom Line: 86 WAR | 3x AL MVP | 11x All-Star | 9x Silver Slugger

Rounding Out Mount Rushmore:

Shohei Ohtani, DH/RHP; Howie Kendrick, 2B; Jered Weaver, RHP
Primetime Players: The Angels have a lot riding on their last three first-rounders: Zach Neto, Nolan Schanuel and Christian Moore. Righthander Jose Soriano took a major step forward in 2024.


LOS ANGELES
DODGERS
**CLAYTON
KERSHAW**
LHP



The 2006 draft was loaded with college pitchers. Andrew Miller, Tim Lincecum, Brad Lincoln, Greg Reynolds, Joba Chamberlain, Max Scherzer, Luke Hochevar and Brandon Morrow occupied eight of the top 10 spots on the BA draft ranking. The lone high school player in the top 10? Clayton Kershaw at No. 6. He fell to the Dodgers with the seventh pick and quickly made his selection look wise. Kershaw reached the majors as a 20-year-old in 2008 and won his first National League Cy Young Award in 2011. Two more followed in 2013 and 2014. Kershaw would have won four Cys in a row—something only Greg Maddux and Randy Johnson have ever done—if not for a fluky season from Mets knuckleballer R.A. Dickey in 2012. Kershaw leads all starting pitchers this century with a 2.50 ERA.

Bottom Line: 79 WAR | 2014 MVP | 3x Cy Young | 2x World Series | 10x All-Star | 1x Gold Glove

Rounding Out Mount Rushmore:

Corey Seager, SS; Russell Martin, C; Kenley Jansen, RHP
Primetime Players: Catcher Will Smith is an integral part of the Dodgers' present-day success. Two prominent big leaguers who were traded away as prospects are Yordan Alvarez and Oneil Cruz.


MIAMI
MARLINS
**GIANCARLO
STANTON**
RF



Stanton, Christian Yelich, JT Realmuto and Marcell Ozuna were teammates for three seasons in Miami. The Marlins never won more than 79 games in that span. So while any one of the four would be a solid pick for best signee for most organizations, it is Stanton who had the most singular ability: elite power. He hit a career-high 59 home runs in his National League MVP season of 2017 and has four other seasons of 35 or more. In the history of BA Best Tools voting, only Mark McGwire, by a count of six to five, ever received more category wins for best power. Back when the Marlins signed Stanton out of his SoCal high school in the second round in 2007, he was a potential wide receiver and outfielder committed to USC. Today, he is chasing 500 home runs as a member of the Yankees, whom he joined in 2018.

Bottom Line: 45 WAR | 2017 NL MVP | 5x All-Star | 2x Silver Slugger

Rounding Out Mount Rushmore:

Christian Yelich, OF; Adrian Gonzalez, 1B; JT Realmuto, C
Primetime Players: The Marlins have had periods of incredible farm productivity. The organization is not actively in one of those periods. An exception is Eury Perez, who will return from Tommy John surgery this season.

The Brewers broke a 26-year playoff drought in 2008 with a team frontloaded with heavy hitters drafted by scouting director Jack Zduriencik. Prince Fielder, JJ Hardy, Rickie Weeks and Corey Hart were key contributors—as was ace Ben Sheets—but Braun reached the highest peaks. Drafted fifth overall out of Miami in 2005, Braun made an instant impression in MLB with a 34-homer rookie season in 2007. He moved from third base to left field in his second season and immediately ascended to stardom. Braun led the National League in OPS in 2011 and 2012, winning MVP honors in the former season. For his career, he hit .296 with 352 home runs and 216 stolen bases in 14 seasons, though his legacy is tainted by his 2013 PED suspension.

Bottom Line: 47 WAR | 2011 NL MVP | 6x All-Star | 5x Silver Slugger

Rounding Out Mount Rushmore:

Lorenzo Cain, OF; Prince Fielder, 1B;
Corbin Burnes, RHP

Primetime Players: The Brewers have one of the strongest farm systems in the game. Their top homegrown big leaguers in 2025 are future superstar outfielder Jackson Chourio and Milwaukee first-round picks Brice Turang, Sal Frelick and Garrett Mitchell.



The Twins passed on perceived top talent Mark Prior at the head of the 2001 draft to take the hometown St. Paul phenom. Mauer was a star catcher and quarterback at Cretin-Derham Hall. Needless to say, Mauer has athleticism to spare. He twice ranked as the No. 1 prospect in baseball and quickly ascended to Minnesota as a 21-year-old. Mauer won an unprecedented-for-a-catcher three batting titles, the final one in his American League MVP season of 2009, when he hit .365 with a career-high 28 home runs. A concussion he suffered in 2013 brought an end to his days behind the plate, but he hung on for five more seasons and maintained a career .306 average. When elected to the Hall of Fame in 2024, Mauer was the first player drafted since 2000 to receive the honor.

Bottom Line: 55 WAR | 2009 AL MVP | 6x All-Star | 3x Gold Glove | 5x Silver Slugger

Rounding Out Mount Rushmore:

Denard Span, OF; Byron Buxton, OF; Jose Berrios, RHP

Primetime Players: Third baseman Royce Lewis has shown in flashes that he has impact potential. Like Mauer, he is a Twins No. 1 overall draft pick. Luis Arraez got his start with the 2019 Twins. He is the active MLB batting average leader and ranks top 10 for OBP.



Wright grew up a Mets fan in the Chesapeake Bay region of Virginia, where the organization's Triple-A affiliate was located for years. So it was only fitting that the Mets drafted Wright 38th overall in 2001, and that he eventually suited up for Norfolk in 2004 on his way to New York. He was an immediate success in MLB and forged the first half of a Hall of Fame career before spinal stenosis curtailed his availability in his 30s. Wright finally got to play in a World Series in 2015 and retired as the Mets' all-time franchise leader in hits, runs, RBIs, doubles and walks. He started five all-star games at third base for the NL, more than anybody but Eddie Mathews, Mike Schmidt or Ken Boyer.

Bottom Line: 49 WAR | 7x All-Star | 2x Gold Glove | 2x Silver Slugger

Rounding Out Mount Rushmore:

Jacob deGrom, RHP; Jose Reyes, SS;
Pete Alonso, 1B

Primetime Players: The 2025 Mets feature two young homegrown regulars in third baseman Mark Vientos and catcher Francisco Alvarez. New York also originally signed second baseman Andres Gimenez, a key to the Francisco Lindor trade, who plays for Toronto this season.



At 6-foot-7, 280 pounds, Judge looks more like a football player and got most of his college offers to play tight end rather than outfield. But Judge loved baseball and focused on it at Fresno State. A big junior year got him noticed by the Yankees, who drafted him 32nd overall in 2013 and got to work on developing him into a monster. Judge set a since-broken rookie record with 52 home runs in 2017 and has taken his game to a new stratosphere in the 2020s, with a pair of 10-win, American League MVP seasons in 2022 and 2024. Among players to bat at least 3,000 times since 2000, Judge's name appears second on the wRC+ leaderboard, in between Barry Bonds and Mike Trout.

Bottom Line: 52 WAR | 2x AL MVP | 6x All-Star | 4x Silver Slugger

Rounding Out Mount Rushmore:

Robinson Cano, 2B; Brett Gardner, OF;
David Robertson, RHP

Primetime Players: The Yankees have done well to integrate up-the-middle rookies in each of the past two seasons. Shortstop Anthony Volpe joined the club in 2023 and Austin Wells took over at catcher in 2024. But most of New York's prospect talent has been used in trades to acquire MLB value.



For all the star players to pass through Oakland this century, none has truly transcended. Olson might come the closest. He has hit 259 home runs through his age-30 season and has averaged 40 per 162 games. In his second season in Atlanta in 2023, Olson led the National League with 54 homers and 139 RBIs and finished fourth in MVP voting. Being traded to the Braves following the 2021 season was a homecoming for Olson, who played first base and pitched for Parkview High when it won High School Team of the Year in 2012. The Athletics drafted him in the supplemental first round that year.

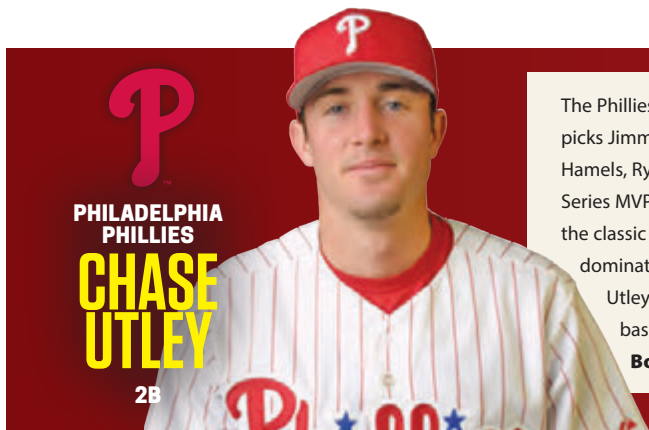
Bottom Line: 33 WAR | 2x All-Star | 2x Gold Glove

Rounding Out Mount Rushmore:

Matt Chapman, 3B; Sonny Gray, RHP; Nick Swisher, OF

Primetime Players: Several key players for the 2025 club are homegrown successes, led by 2024 standout rookies Lawrence Butler and Mason Miller. College draft picks Jacob Wilson and Zack Gelof could form the double-play combo for years to come. First-round picks Tyler Soderstrom and Max Muncy appeared in the Opening Day lineup.





The Phillies built a championship core through the draft, hitting big on late 1990s draft picks Jimmy Rollins, Pat Burrell and Brett Myers as well as early 2000s selections Cole Hamels, Ryan Howard and Utley. Howard won an MVP and Hamels was 2008 World Series MVP, but it is Utley who is most highly regarded in sabermetric circles. He has the classic underrated profile of a player who was good at everything but didn't truly dominate any one facet of the game. Still, among second basemen of this century, Utley is right there near the top of the heap for batting value, defensive value and baserunning value.

Bottom Line: 65 WAR | 1x World Series | 6x All-Star | 4x Silver Slugger

Rounding Out Mount Rushmore:

Cole Hamels, LHP; Aaron Nola, RHP;

Ryan Howard, 1B

Primetime Players: Top prospect Andrew Painter has a chance to make this category his own. Until he arrives, first-round position players Alec Bohm and Bryson Stott are the best homegrown young Phillies. The Phillies drafted Logan O'Hoppe, one of the better young catchers today, in the 23rd round in 2018.



McCutchen's bat speed was impossible for scouts to ignore at his Florida high school, despite his short and lean stature. The Pirates drafted him 11th overall and watched as McCutchen produced more WAR than any player in a loaded 2005 draft that also included Ryan Braun, Troy Tulowitzki, Ryan Zimmerman, Alex Gordon and Justin Upton. When "Cutch" peaked from 2012 to 2015, he carried the Pirates to their only three postseason appearances since Barry Bonds left town after the 1992 season. While he became more of a complementary player during the back the back half of his career, McCutchen had an incredibly well-rounded game, which he showed off in his National League MVP season of 2013 with a .317 average, 21 home runs, 38 doubles, 78 walks and 27 stolen bases.

Bottom Line: 49 WAR | 2013 NL MVP | 5x All-Star | 1x Gold Glove | 4x Silver Slugger

Rounding Out Mount Rushmore:

Gerrit Cole, RHP; Starling Marte, OF;

Jose Bautista, OF

Primetime Players: Reigning Rookie of the Year Paul Skenes points the way forward in Pittsburgh. He fronts a Pirates rotation that could also include homegrown pitchers Jared Jones, Mitch Keller, Bubba Chandler and Thomas Harrington.



The Cardinals reached the postseason in 13 of Molina's 19 seasons in St. Louis, winning it all in 2006 and 2011. Like contemporary Buster Posey or Hall of Famers Johnny Bench, Yogi Berra or Roy Campanella, Molina backstopped a lot of October success. His older brothers Bengie and Jose were already big league catchers at the time the Cardinals drafted Yadier in the fourth round in 2000 out of high school in Puerto Rico. The Cardinals never wavered in their faith in Molina, even as he produced a 76 OPS+ through his first five MLB seasons. While he was never an offensive force, Molina's bat peaked in his late 20s and he turned in back-to-back top-five MVP finishes in 2012 and 2013. That was in the middle of a run of all-star nods and Gold Glove wins few catchers can match.

Bottom Line: 42 WAR | 2x World Series | 10x All-Star | 9x Gold Glove | 1x Silver Slugger

Rounding Out Mount Rushmore:

Dan Haren, RHP; Lance Lynn, RHP;

Matt Carpenter, 2B

Primetime Players: The rebuilding Cardinals look to young players such as Masyn Winn. St. Louis infamously traded Sandy Alcantara and Zac Gallen for Marcell Ozuna and later dealt Randy Arozarena to add Matthew Liberatore.



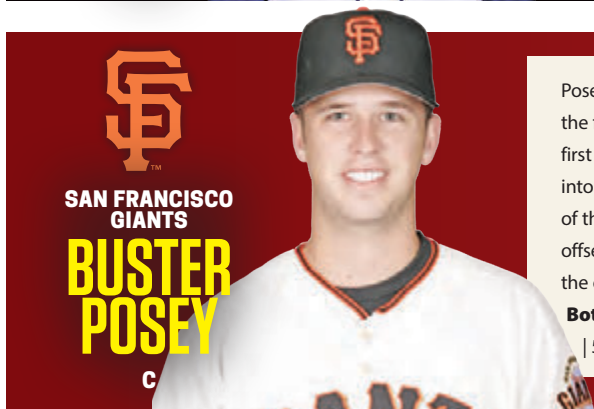
No organization has traded away as many of its most talented signees as the Padres. Turner is the most obvious example. San Diego drafted Turner out of North Carolina State with the 13th overall pick in 2014 but then fired GM Josh Byrnes a few weeks later. In August that year, the Padres replaced Byrnes with AJ Preller, who that offseason agreed to trade Turner to the Nationals in a three-team deal that brought Wil Myers to San Diego. Turner thrived in Washington, where he was a key member of the 2019 World Series champions and later helped fetch Josiah Gray and Keibert Ruiz in a trade with the Dodgers. Turner later signed with the Phillies for \$300 million and continues to deliver power, speed and a reliable shortstop glove.

Bottom Line: 36 WAR | 2019 World Series | 3x All-Star | 1x Silver Slugger

Rounding Out Mount Rushmore:

Corey Kluber, RHP; Chase Headley, 3B; Max Fried, LHP

Primetime Players: The Padres bucked consensus to draft Maryland prep shortstop Jackson Merrill with the 27th pick in 2021. San Diego is the original signing organization for Emmanuel Clase as well as the Nationals' trio of James Wood, CJ Abrams and MacKenzie Gore, who all were part of the 2022 Juan Soto trade.



Posey turned in a truly epic junior year at Florida State in 2008, yet slipped to the Giants with the fifth pick in the draft. Two years later, he was a rookie catcher leading San Francisco to its first of three World Series titles in five years. Posey concentrated a tremendous amount of value into 12 big league seasons, winning National League MVP honors in 2012 after missing most of the previous season with a leg and ankle injury suffered in a nasty home plate collision. This offseason, Posey took over as the Giants' president of baseball operations as he tries to steer the organization back on track.

Bottom Line: 45 WAR | 2012 NL MVP | 3x World Series | 7x All-Star | 1x Gold Glove | 5x Silver Slugger

Rounding Out Mount Rushmore:

Zack Wheeler, RHP; Madison Bumgarner, LHP;

Tim Lincecum, RHP

Primetime Players: The Giants drew on their history of drafting frontline starting pitchers when they selected Logan Webb in the fourth round in 2014. Young position regulars such as outfielder Heliot Ramos and catcher Patrick Bailey have emerged in recent seasons.

This year, Ichiro came within one vote of becoming the first unanimous Hall of Fame position player. Twenty-five seasons earlier, he proved that the skills of Japanese superstar hitters would translate to MLB. Suzuki quickly adapted to the American game by winning the MVP and Rookie of the Year awards in 2001. While he never hit more than 15 home runs in a season, Suzuki did everything else at an elite level. Suzuki won a record 41 categories in BA Best Tools voting over the years, including for best hitter, fastest baserunner, best defensive outfielder and best outfield arm. He set the single-season hits record with 262 in 2004 and amassed 3,089 hits in MLB.

Bottom Line: 60 WAR | 2001 AL MVP | 10x All-Star | 10x Gold Glove | 3x Silver Slugger

Rounding Out Mount Rushmore:

Felix Hernandez, RHP; Shin-Soo Choo, OF; Ketel Marte, 2B

Primetime Players: The Mariners have built a home-grown core centered on center fielder Julio Rodriguez, catcher Cal Raleigh and righthanders Logan Gilbert and George Kirby. Seattle is also the original signing organization for two other teams' No. 1 starters: the Twins' Pablo Lopez and the Brewers' Freddy Peralta.



The Rays nailed two high-leverage draft picks in a row, taking Evan Longoria third overall in 2006 and then Price first overall in 2007. Price gets the nod in this exercise as an ace lefthander who lived up to 1-1 expectations and had incredible peak value, highlighted by a 2012 American League Cy Young Award win with the Rays and a dominant 2018 World Series performance with the champion Red Sox.

Bottom Line: 40 WAR | 2012 AL Cy Young | 1x World Series | 5x All-Star

Rounding Out Mount Rushmore: Evan Longoria, 3B; James Shields, RHP; Blake Snell, LHP

Primetime Players: The Rays never lack for young MLB talent. The prime homegrown examples for the 2025 team are second baseman Brandon Lowe and first baseman Jonathan Aranda. Shane McClellan should return this season. Quality big leaguers on other teams who were originally signed by Tampa Bay include Phillies lefthander Cristopher Sanchez and Nationals first baseman Nathaniel Lowe.



An injury-plagued junior year at Georgia Tech in 2001 helped push Teixeira down the board to the Rangers at No. 5 overall. After one full season in the minors, Teixeira reached Texas and quickly established himself as a perennial plus hitter with 35-homer power and a gold glove. Like Juan Soto years later, Teixeira was a Scott Boras client who was traded twice before reaching free agency. On the open market, Teixeira, much like Soto would 16 years later, signed with a New York team on a megadeal. Teixeira shined for the 2009 Yankees, finishing runner-up for American League MVP and picking up his lone World Series ring. Teixeira's production tapered off in his 30s—the infield shift did him no favors—but he still popped 409 home runs in 14 seasons.

Bottom Line: 51 WAR | 1x World Series | 3x All-Star | 5x Gold Glove | 3x Silver Slugger

Rounding Out Mount Rushmore: Ian Kinsler, 2B; Yu Darvish, RHP; Edwin Encarnacion, 1B

Primetime Players: The Rangers' 2023 World Series team was built through free agent expenditures and shrewd moves around the margins. During their title run, Texas traded 2016 first-rounder Cole Ragans for Aroldis Chapman. Other notable homegrowns: Josh Jung, Wyatt Langford and Evan Carter.



The Blue Jays dominated exercises like this in the 1980s and '90s. Back then, nobody signed more future MLB talent than Toronto, e.g. Roy Halladay, Carlos Delgado, John Olerud, Chris Carpenter and Shawn Green, especially under Hall of Fame executive Pat Gillick. The 21st century Blue Jays have not been nearly as successful, though Guerrero is one of the best international free agent signings made by any club in the last 25 years. He has a couple 6 WAR seasons under his belt—and he finished runner-up for the 2021 American League MVP. A \$500 million extension signed in April will keep Guerrero in Toronto through 2039.

Bottom Line: 22 WAR | 4x All-Star | Gold Glove | 2x Silver Slugger

Rounding Out Mount Rushmore:

Marcus Stroman, RHP; Noah Syndergaard, RHP; Aaron Hill, 2B

Primetime Players: Guerrero and shortstop Bo Bichette have helped spark the Blue Jays to three postseason appearances in their five full seasons together. They will try to make it four appearances in six seasons in 2025, before Bichette qualifies for free agency.



Harper helped elevate the status of the MLB draft when he rose to national prominence while still in high school. He attained his GED at age 16, then attended junior college for a year in order to become draft eligible a year early. The Nationals had the good fortune to draft No. 1 overall in both 2009 and 2010, netting them Stephen Strasburg and Harper in back-to-back years. Harper ascended to Washington as a 19-year-old in 2012 and instantly became a star, winning a National League MVP award in 2015 and then again in 2021 after signing with the Phillies. He has a bead on 500 home runs and a place in Cooperstown.

Bottom Line: 51 WAR | 2x NL MVP | 8x All-Star | 4x Silver Slugger

Rounding Out Mount Rushmore: Juan Soto, OF; Stephen Strasburg, RHP; Ryan Zimmerman, 3B

Primetime Players: For a big league team brimming with young talent, the Nationals don't have as many homegrown players as other young teams. Trades of Max Scherzer, Trea Turner and Juan Soto helped turn over the roster. The best MLB bets for 2025 among players signed by Washington are right fielder Dylan Crews or second baseman Luis Garcia Jr.



American League

ORGANIZATION REPORT



- The Tigers got the best of Josue Briceño in the AFL last year. Now, they want to get that production in 2025, while settling on a defensive home. **PAGE 31**

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Double-A Red Sox lefthander Connelly Early showed off what he learned at offseason training camps the past two years.

A's Bolte Works To Simplify Approach

Henry Bolte grew up in Palo Alto attending Athletics games with his father.

So when the A's drafted him in the second round in 2022, it just meant more.

While the A's have moved out of Oakland Coliseum, Bolte is making adjustments to reach the big leagues all the same. Now, the 21-year-old outfielder is working to simplify his approach at the plate.

"I'm trying to get to a good hitting position—on time more consistently—and I think that allows you to deliver a good swing on a lot of pitches," Bolte said after the Spring Breakout game. "To have adjustability and make more contact.

"So really (I'm) just loading a little bit earlier and a little bit simpler, getting to my launch position."

Last season at High-A Lansing and Double-A Midland, Bolte hit .267/.368/.466 with 15 homers and 46 steals in 123 games. He struck out nearly 35% of the time.

"He gets a little streaky, but when you draft guys like that, you're betting on the ceiling," A's farm director **Ed Sprague** said. "You're never sure where the floor is going to land, and the ceiling is as high as it gets in terms of his athleticism and all his tools that he comes with."

Bolte takes pride in his defense in right field and center. He credits early work routines for his strong play and said that batting practice is a great time to get that work in.

He takes even more pride in his speed, which never slumps. "I was born quick. I don't know," Bolte said.

"You're not always able to get hits," said Bolte, who opened at Midland this year, "and so being able to impact the game like that, whether or not I'm on the bases or even breaking up plays, forcing errors is something that just never takes a day off."

—JESSICA KLEINSCHMIDT

Fruit Makes A Good First Impression

Throwing strikes late in the game when Orioles manager **Brandon Hyde** summons him from minor league camp to cover innings in a Grapefruit League game is a good way to make a strong first impression.

Showing high-90s velocity and bat-missing stuff doesn't hurt, either—and that's what 25-year-old righthander **Zach Fruit** showed in his spring training cameos.

"Fruit at the end, that was impressive to

watch," Hyde told reporters after one such outing. "It was a lot of fun . . . I'm excited about the future of our pitching."

Fruit had two three-inning outings in major league camp. First, he struck out five in three scoreless innings on March 11 against the Yankees, and then he notched four strikeouts while allowing one run on March 17 against the Red Sox.

His four-seam fastball was up to 100.3 mph in the first outing, averaging nearly 98, and he missed bats with that pitch as well as his sweeper and cutter.

Like many in the Orioles' system, Fruit comes without pedigree but with plenty of stuff. The Michigan native spent two seasons at Lansing Community College, two at Eastern Michigan and one at Troy before the Orioles signed him for \$40,000 as a ninth-round pick in 2023.

He spent the entire 2024 season at High-A Aberdeen, striking out 113 in 107 innings with a 1.24 WHIP and 3.03 ERA. Fruit was mostly a reliever in college, relying heavily on his sinker and slider, but the Orioles quickly unlocked more.

He added a four-seamer that's now distinct from his sinker. He quickly took to a one-seam changeup last spring, brought along his curveball and developed a plan to counter batters on both sides of the plate.

While Fruit's crossbody delivery has traditionally signaled reliever risk, the Orioles believe he can locate consistently enough as he opens at Double-A Chesapeake.

—JON MEOLI

B Early Rises In First Taste Of Double-A

Lefthander **Connelly Early** remembers exactly how hard he threw as a Virginia junior.

"Ninety on the dot," he chuckled of his average fastball velocity.

But since the Red Sox drafted him in the fifth round in 2023, Early has been one of the most committed participants in the organization's offseason training program.

Following both the 2023 and 2024 seasons, Early and **Kristian Campbell** had perfect attendance at offseason training programs in Fort Myers, Fla.

Boston's prospect development camps run from the end of the minor league season through the start of spring training, with a break for the required dark period from mid November until the new year.

The results have been obvious and significant in both the power and shapes of



Capable of physically overpowering hitters in the bullpen, Grant Taylor envisions himself as a starter for the White Sox.

Early's pitches.

"Literally every time we give him a player plan goal, he knocks it off," Red Sox director of pitching **Justin Willard** said. "He's the goal crusher."

"Every time you set a new benchmark for him, he's like, 'OK, cool, I got that one.' And then you move it again."

Early's four-seam fastball averaged 93 mph and topped out at 96 in 2024. This spring, he often sat at 94 mph while topping out near 97, his fastball serving as the foundation of a five-pitch mix that allows him to attack all parts of the strike zone.

He shows an excellent changeup with arm-side fade, as well as a sweeper, cutter and curveball.

In 23 starts split between High-A Greenville and Double-A Portland in 2024, Early posted a 3.99 ERA with a 31% strikeout rate and 9% walk rate. His 54% groundball rate helped him avoid damage—he allowed just seven home runs in 103 innings.

Early's performance and pitch mix increasingly look like those of a potential big league starter, possibly later this season.

—ALEX SPEIER

Sox Taylor Sets Sights On White Sox Rotation

Grant Taylor is the rare pitcher who looks just as athletic in still images as he does on video.

By the time his arm is cocked, the

22-year-old righthander's back leg is almost completely straightened out behind him, still tickling the pitching rubber with his toes as he generates some of the most impressive hip-shoulder separation and extension in the sport.

It's a level of physicality that produced 101 mph velocity in Taylor's first outing of the spring, and a level of stuff that fueled a two-inning relief outing against the Dodgers where he struck out six batters.

And it's a talent that has the White Sox leapfrogging Taylor a level to put him in the Double-A Birmingham rotation to start 2025, while also wondering if they'll be able to harness his abilities in the rotation.

"He could be one of the best leverage arms in all of baseball, honestly, but that might be down the road," White Sox senior advisor to pitching **Brian Bannister** said. "There's something really special about him anatomically that allows him to do things that most pitchers can't do."

"But with that, we're very conscious of his health and we want to do what's best for him."

It's a testament to Taylor's pure stuff that his prospect status has risen in the absence of any real performance track record. He fell to the White Sox in the second round of the 2023 draft after he had Tommy John surgery as an LSU junior.

He threw fewer than 30 innings last season between Low-A Kannapolis and the Arizona Fall League due to a lat strain.

But rather than accept a relief future,

Taylor is only expanding his arsenal. He throws three breaking pitches—curveball, slider and a hard cutter that has hit 94 mph—and he's one of many recent adopters of the kick-changeup.

"The more options I have, the more I can gain confidence throwing pitches, it's only going to be to my benefit," Taylor said.

"The 100 (mph), if I throw it 60% of the time, it starts to not look like 100 mph quite so much."

—JAMES FEGAN



A Stronger Messick Sees Stuff Ticks Up

The Guardians used 13 of 21 picks in the 2022 draft to select pitchers. Their third-highest bonus in that class went to second-round Florida State lefthander **Parker Messick**.

From college ace to pro routine, Messick has made a smooth transition. The squat, 6-foot southpaw spent the second half of last season at Double-A Akron, where he recorded a 2.06 ERA in 65.2 innings along with 85 strikeouts and 21 walks.

He was one of just 20 minor league pitchers to strike out at least 30% of batters while compiling at least 100 innings.

"Parker had a great camp," Guardians assistant GM **James Harris** said. "He worked very hard this offseason with our pitching team, led by **Ben Johnson**. Physically, he added lean mass and strength. He showed strides in raising his velocity ceiling and floor."

That uptick in velocity was not unexpected. Messick arrived at FSU with a fastball that touched 95 mph. The 24-year-old averaged about 92 mph last season and topped out near 96. He also throws a changeup, cutter, curveball and slider.

Messick opened eyes on more than one front this spring.

"Parker has been getting encouraging results on swings and misses," Harris said. "He continues to work on the execution of his slider and his curveball to sharpen his repertoire. He is known as a competitor on the mound, and we are excited by his progress."

Messick has the potential to move quickly this season. He opened the season in the Triple-A Columbus rotation.

That he is a lefthander can only help his progression. Cleveland opened the season with only one lefthander, **Logan T. Allen**, in its rotation. Rookie southpaw **Joey Cantillo** made the club as a reliever.

—JIM INGRAHAM



Parker Messick missed plenty of bats last season. The Guardians believe he has more in store after adding strength.

Briceño Stays Relevant At Two Positions

When the Tigers front office discussed who to send to the 2024 Arizona Fall League, **Josue Briceño** was not initially very high on the list.

Their hesitation stemmed from Briceño's limited exposure at Low-A Lakeland because of a sprained posterior cruciate ligament in his knee he suffered while catching during a game on May 12.

The injury put Briceño out of commission until Aug. 23.

"Given his limited at-bats in Low-A, we had a lot of discussions about sending Josue to the AFL at all," Tigers vice president and assistant GM **Ryan Garko** said.

The Tigers' decision to send Briceño out west would pay dividends.

"His performance across the board offensively made us very happy we decided to send him," Garko said. "He controlled the zone, he hit, and he hit the ball very, very hard."

The 20-year-old won the first triple crown in AFL history, batting .433 with 10 home runs and 27 RBIs in 25 games, while playing first base exclusively. He also earned league MVP honors.

"The AFL was spectacular," Briceño said. "I had a great time. It was a new experience, but I really liked it. Upon returning from Arizona, I didn't have much time to work in

the regular offseason, so I focused more on getting a little stronger in the gym, and on the things I was lacking in."

The Tigers now must determine his defensive home. Briceño did extensive work with catching coordinator **Brayan Peña**.

"We value versatility across our entire system, and Josue is no different," Garko said. "The Fall League gave us the opportunity to let him work exclusively as a first baseman and it was very productive. He showed soft hands and good range and a natural ability to work around the bag."

This year, the Tigers plan to have Briceño focus on playing catcher at High-A West Michigan, while keeping his bat in the lineup with reps at first base.

—EMILY WALDON



Pecko Stands Poised For A Big Season

When asked for a player to highlight off his Double-A Corpus Christi roster, manager **Ricky Rivera** didn't hesitate when suggesting righthander **Ethan Pecko**.

The 2023 sixth-round pick out of Towson returns to Double-A after pitching 26.2 innings for the Hooks last season. Pecko pitched at both Class A levels before reaching the Texas League.

All told, he pitched to a 3.47 ERA with 125 strikeouts and 37 walks in 96 innings. He

allowed 10 home runs, half of them during his month at hitter-friendly High-A Asheville.

"He really came through, put himself on the map," Rivera said. "He's one of our top pitching prospects right now. He continues to improve."

"Obviously the stuff is pretty good. The velo continues to climb."

The Astros picked Pecko as their organizational minor league pitcher of the year in 2024. He could push his way to the big leagues this year.

The 22-year-old can ride his fastball up to 96 mph but it usually sits 92-94. Pecko is still refining his slider and cutter.

"And he has a pretty good changeup and a curveball," Rivera said.

Pecko has put himself in a position to succeed. Now in his third year in the organization, he has impressed coaches and staff with his professionalism.

"It's a good makeup and good work ethic," Rivera says. "Good kid. Those are the kids who are super easy to root for."

—JOSE DE JESUS ORTIZ



Mozzicato Stands Poised To Step Forward

Lefthander **Frank Mozzicato's** prospect shine has faded in the past two seasons as his fastball velocity decreased and his walk rate has gone up.

As he enters his fifth year in the Royals organization after being drafted seventh overall out of high school in 2021, he is showing signs that he's ready to take the next step in his development.

Mozzicato topped out at 95 mph in spring training and sat 92-94 during the Royals' Spring Breakout game on an unseasonably cold Arizona night. He pitched at 87-91 last season.

One of Mozzicato's issues with maintaining fastball velocity has been keeping weight on his still-slender 6-foot-3 frame. It's been an ongoing development goal.

Mozzicato, who will turn 22 in June, believes that maintaining strength is primarily a matter of physical maturity.

"I feel like as I get older," Mozzicato said, "I'll keep getting stronger and it'll be easier to keep that weight on."

It's also obvious that the Connecticut native is coming into the 2025 season with a positive attitude.

"I feel confident," Mozzicato said, "and I'm going into it just like any other year of just having fun out there and being aggressive on the mound and pounding the zone."

Ongoing control issues have been attributed in part to Mozzicato's long arm action, and he worked to shorten his delivery in the offseason.

Some scouts think Mozzicato would fit better in the bullpen, where his fast-ball could tick up and he could dominate lefthanded batters with his plus curveball.

Last season he made 22 starts for High-A Quad Cities and posted a 3.45 ERA with 91 strikeouts and 62 walks in 101.2 innings.

He opened the 2025 season back in the Midwest League, where he is focused on remaining a starter.

—BILL MITCHELL



Johnson Makes Opening Day Roster

Ryan Johnson's first professional pitch was also his first in the major leagues.

The Angels are notorious for their audacious player promotions. Still, it was an unexpected turn for the 22-year-old righthander.

Johnson felt he would have a traditional development path to Anaheim. Instead, the 2024 second-rounder became the 24th player in MLB history to make the jump from the draft to the big leagues without spending a day in the minor leagues.

"I was pretty surprised by it," said Johnson, a Dallas Baptist product. "It's a crazy road. Unreal and not how I pictured it. I thought it would be more like three or four years down the road."

"I was planning for the long haul."

The Angels have aggressively fast-tracked their college draftees. Four of them were the first player from their draft classes to reach MLB: **Chase Silseth**, **Zach Neto**, **Nolan Schanuel** and Johnson from the 2021 through 2024 drafts.

Johnson made six appearances in the Cactus League and allowed five runs in 11.1 innings with 10 strikeouts and one walk.

Johnson has changed the grip on his cutter since his DBU days. He once used a gyro slider grip. Now he uses a four-seam fastball grip that is a little off-center. It helps him get into "that natural supination and kind of cut it," according to Johnson.

"He handled himself like a pro and his work ethic was exactly what we expected out of the draft," Angels GM **Perry Minasian** said. "We feel like he's got weapons for both sides and is somebody who can help us win baseball games."

The Angels had hoped that Johnson's collegiate strike-throwing would translate



Switch-pitcher Jurrangel Cijntje shined this spring. Now, the Mariners must decide how to develop him in the rotation.

and he could develop into a workhorse starter. That is still the plan.

"We believe he is going to be a starter," Minasian said. "I think there's tons of examples of guys who have broken in from the bullpen and eventually started."

—TAYLOR BLAKE WARD



Twins Unveil Plan To Keep Prielipp Healthy

Connor Prielipp was a Friday night starter at Alabama, an ace lefthander who pitched the first game of a weekend series.

After Tommy John surgery, plus another operation to add an internal brace to his elbow, Prielipp may be a Friday starter in the Twins' system this season, too.

"He looks amazing. His pitches look different than anyone else's," Twins president of baseball operations **Derek Falvey** said. "I watched a bullpen one day, and it didn't take long to notice the quality of his stuff."

"The velocity, every fastball in the high 90s, is nice, but the sharpness of his slider is unbelievable—you can see that right out of his hand."

For a 2022 second-round pick who has pitched just 30 pro innings, it's a thrilling step forward.

"When we drafted him, we knew it might take some time" for Prielipp to regain the dominance he showed in college, Falvey

said. "You never know if he can regain the form that made him so great."

"The way he looks this spring, it's clear that he's back. Now it's up to us to turn that ability into results."

They'll do that, according to Twins GM **Jeremy Zoll**, by putting Prielipp on a college schedule. He will pitch once a week until he proves his durability.

"A once-a-week schedule keeps him really routine-oriented. He'll have some shorter outings in the early going, and we'll build up some workload to get his feet under him," Zoll said.

Prielipp opened with Double-A Wichita. He will be limited to just three or four innings per outing.

While the Twins haven't ruled out keeping him in the rotation as his elbows heal, "his profile, internally, has evolved into more of a hard-throwing lefty reliever," Falvey said.

"When you watch him pitch, you think he can do anything. He may be the best lefthander we've ever drafted. But keeping him healthy is our responsibility now."

—PHIL MILLER



Yankees Like What They See From Reyzelman

The Yankees used their Spring Breakout game to get one more look at an arm they believe can help them soon.

They continue to like what they see from 23-year-old righthander **Eric Reyzelman**, who threw a scoreless inning.

The reliever continues to move quickly and started the season at Triple-A Scranton/Wilkes-Barre following 23.1 innings with Double-A Somerset last year.

Twice cut from his high school baseball team, the 6-foot-2, 188-pound Reyzelman has been something of a late-bloomer. He posted mostly unspectacular numbers in college at San Francisco before transferring to LSU in 2022 and skyrocketing to the fifth round of that year's draft.

Reyzelman said he became a new pitcher with the Tigers in 2022. "And I'm not the same pitcher now that I was then," he said.

"I was a guy who came into the game in certain situations and threw 15 fastballs and then sat down. That's something that I'm not anymore, and I'm proud of the work I've been able to do with our development staff."

Reyzelman has been limited to just 50.1 pro innings over the past three seasons because of recurring back injuries, and he also suffered a scare early in big league camp this year when he was taken to the hospital due to a peanut allergy.

He has flashed signs of becoming an MLB high-leverage reliever when's been able to stay on the field, which is a testament to the development of his secondary offerings.

Reyzelman sits at 96-99 mph with a fastball he complements with a changeup and slider.

According to Yankees pitching coordinator **Brett DeGagne**, who also served as Reyzelman's pitching coach last year at Double-A, features "three plus pitches" he can mix in at any time.

"We've had some really good reliever prospects come through the organization," DeGagne said, "and he's up there in that echelon of those guys."

"He's going to be a factor in the future."

—MIKE ASHMORE



Cijntje Offers World Of Possibilities

With his first pitch at the Mariners' Spring Breakout game, **Jurrangel Cijntje** threw a 92 mph fastball with his left arm that Guardians second baseman **Travis Bazzana** grounded to shortstop.

Cijntje—pronounced SAYN-chuh—then switched to his right arm for the rest of his outing. He threw as hard as 98.9 mph.

As a rare switch-pitcher, Cijntje is the object of fascination around the league.

"Jurangello is amazing," Mariners pitching coordinator **Quinn Cleary** said. "It's now at the point where I see it every day, so I'm almost numb to how crazy it is."

Cijntje was born in the Netherlands, attended high school in Florida after growing up in Curacao and was drafted 15th overall by Seattle in 2024 after a standout sophomore season at Mississippi State.

He didn't pitch in the minors following the draft, so for many the Spring Breakout game was the first glimpse of Cijntje in pro ball. His teammates lined up to watch.

"When spring training came, we had a group of new players come," Cleary said. "They see him throw a bullpen, they see him switch hands in the glove, and they're like, 'Holy . . .'"

"This is the coolest thing they've ever seen."

The majority of Cijntje's reps will come as a righthander, but he'll still get plenty of chances to throw lefty too. His upper-90s fastball, hard slider and changeup give him a higher ceiling from the right side. He throws about 92-93 mph from the left with a nice slider.

Cleary said the initial plan for Cijntje is to make two outings a week for High-A Everett. The first will be a start as a righty with hopefully an opportunity for him to throw lefthanded to a few batters, followed by a relief outing two or three days later as a lefty.

"We really don't know what (he's) going to look like exactly," Cleary said, "but . . . there are just so many different possibilities and so many different options."

—SHANE LANTZ

TB Kinney Looks Forward To Healthy Season

The Rays selected **Cooper Kinney** with their second pick in the 2021 draft.

With its first, Tampa Bay selected San Diego high school shortstop **Carson Williams**, who now stands as the organization's No. 1 prospect.

Kinney has gotten off to a slower start. He missed all of 2022 and a good chunk of 2024 to right shoulder injuries that required labrum surgery.

This season, the 22-year-old second baseman is seeing his first action above Class A by opening at Double-A Montgomery.

Reunited with Williams for the Rays' Spring Breakout game against the Red Sox, Kinney showed his hitting potential by rapping three hits in the Rays' 7-5 win.

"I need a full, healthy year, and I feel like I



Jake Bloss rocketed to Houston last year. The Blue Jays are slowing down his tempo and have goals for him at Triple-A.

can just do what I do," Kinney said. "First off, just stay healthy. That's what's got to happen first. And I'm excited to get to go play."

"I feel great. Body feels good, so I'm excited to get going."

Kinney realizes that the injuries changed the path of his career.

"It's not exactly how I was hoping (my career) would start," Kinney said. "But I'm coming along, and getting to play every day is an awesome experience."

"Getting to be in this organization where everybody's good and everybody's talented, it's been a blast."

Last season, Kinney appeared in 87 games for High-A Bowling Green and hit .289/.352/.494 with 10 home runs and six stolen bases. He plays mostly second base but sees some time at third base.

The Rays drafted the lefthanded hitter 34th overall out of the Baylor School in Chattanooga.

—MARC TOPKIN

T Osuna Plays His Way Into Outfield Mix

The Rangers knew by the start of spring training which outfielders had a chance at making the Opening Day roster, and **Alejandro Osuna** wasn't one of them.

He had never played above Double-A, but no player in Rangers big league camp left a stronger impression.

Osuna hit .429/.523/.714 in 24 games. Playing mostly left field, he made a number

of terrific defensive plays.

Osuna started the season at Double-A Frisco, where he finished 2024, but he is expected to quickly reach Triple-A Round Rock if he continues on the path that kept him in big league camp from start to finish.

"I love watching him and the way he plays," Rangers manager **Bruce Bochy** said. "Everything he's done is what you're hoping to see from a young guy, and he just opened your eyes and made a lot of noise."

Osuna's older brother is **Roberto Osuna**, the former MLB closer now pitching in Japan, and his uncle **Antonio** was also a big league reliever.

He's learned some lessons from them on what it takes to be in the majors and to be grateful to be playing the game.

Amid all the buzz he generated, he stayed humble.

"My mentality was just to come here to do my normal things 100% to show how I can play," said Osuna, a 22-year-old from Mexico. "I wasn't trying to impress anybody. I always play with my 100% because I love this sport."

The Rangers have a crowded outfield with **Wyatt Langford**, **Leody Taveras** and **Adolis Garcia**.

Evan Carter started the season at Triple-A after being unable in spring training to make up for the time he lost last year. Carter remains ahead of Osuna, and **Dustin Harris** might also be ahead.

"It's really exciting to think about what he can develop into," Rangers president of baseball operations **Chris Young** said.

"Our hope is he gets off to a great start, but it's very realistic to think that he could help our major league team at some point this season."

—JEFF WILSON



Bloss Adapts To New Pace With New Club

After a year of accelerating through the Astros' system, **Jake Bloss** is slowing down the tempo with the Blue Jays.

The promising righthander, who was a centerpiece of the return for **Yusei Kikuchi** last summer, opened 2025 with Triple-A Buffalo after surging through the minors to make his MLB debut for Houston last year.

He started slowly during his first spring training with the Blue Jays but finished strong. Toronto manager **John Schneider** said his parting words for Bloss when he was assigned to the Bisons was to focus on "pitch mix and execution."

"His stuff is where it should be," Schneider added. "He was kind of wandering, I feel like, (in) his first couple outings. We forget that he's 23. He's a bright kid."

"But you can't assume anything in terms of pitch deployment and execution, so he definitely made strides in that aspect."

The Blue Jays' deliberate approach comes after his time with the Astros was a blur.

Bloss made seven appearances in 2023, the same year he was drafted out of Georgetown in the third round by Houston, before beginning 2024 at High-A Asheville. Four starts later he earned a promotion to Double-A Corpus Christi, where he made eight starts before debuting against Baltimore on June 21.

Right shoulder discomfort led to an injured list stint for Bloss. After a rehab outing, he made two more starts in the majors before he was dealt to the Blue Jays, where he had eight outings of mixed-bag results at Buffalo.

"In Houston, they have a model they believe in, and if you're throwing well or hitting well, they're going to move you quick," Bloss said.

"So I had an idea it might be pretty quick—maybe not quite that quick—but I'm not going to complain about it, you know?"

Obviously not, but the Blue Jays are pulling back the reins, Schneider said.

"We want him to get used to starting on a normal five-day pace," the manager said. "And harnessing the stuff in the right spot of the zone."

—SHI DAVIDI

National League ORGANIZATIONAL REPORTS



● Esmerlyn Valdez has rare power in the Pirates' system. This year, he wants to get to more of it via a more judicious plate approach. **PAGE 37**



PAGE 35 Sal Stewart has a reputation as a bat-first player. The Reds have a plan to hasten his arrival in Cincinnati.

A Cabrera Shines Post-Suspension

Last year, righthander **Jose Cabrera** came back from an 80-game PED suspension looking like a different pitcher.

In the process, he might have turned himself into the best under-the-radar pitching prospect in the D-backs organization.

"I think when you have that much time off, it can be an opportunity where you can use it to get better and work on certain things—or you can sometimes fall behind from it," D-backs pitching coordinator **Kyle Driscoll** said. "He chose to get better."

When he was suspended in September 2023 following a positive test for bolde-none, Cabrera was operating with a fastball that averaged 92.7 mph. After returning in June 2024, he averaged 94.2 mph.

He also refined the shapes on his four-seamer and two-seamer and added a cutter, which quickly took on a significant role in his arsenal.

"I think he had that time off on the restricted list and I think he spent that time wisely," D-backs farm director **Chris Slivka** said. "He dedicated himself in a lot of different areas."

In 11 starts with High-A Hillsboro last year, Cabrera posted a 2.32 ERA in 66 innings. He struck out 62 and walked 18. It was quite the improvement from 2023, when his ERA was 5.28 in 107.1 innings.

In a minor league backfield game late in March, Cabrera sat at 95-97 mph while pitching with an aggressive, attacking style.

"It's really intriguing because he can hammer the zone with all of those pitches," Slivka said. "Then you add the power piece—it's a really interesting package."

The 6-foot-3, 190-pound Cabrera opened the season with Double-A Amarillo.

"We definitely see him as a starter," Driscoll said. "Not only from the arsenal, but his ability to read hitters, read swings and know which pitches to throw and when. The delivery is repeatable and it's powerful."

—NICK PIECORO

A Waldrep Brings Back Key Pitch To Repertoire

Hurston Waldrep is somewhat a forgotten man in the Braves' pitching mix.

Rookie righthander **AJ Smith-Shawver** and his dynamic stuff headlines a list of intriguing young pitchers in Atlanta, but Waldrep—the club's 2023 first-round pick—has not received much buzz.



After a stint in big league camp, the Cubs' James Triantos knows what he must do at Triple-A to earn his first callup.

The former Florida Gators ace made two MLB starts a year ago, failing to make a strong impression. He missed a month with elbow inflammation before spending the rest of 2024 at Triple-A Gwinnett.

The 23-year-old Waldrep had a quiet spring, making only one appearance before the team optioned him to Triple-A. But those around him said Waldrep seemed far more comfortable than a year ago.

Notable was that he gained the natural confidence that comes with having "been there." He's better adjusted to the pace of the pro game, which has been a learning process since leaving Florida.

That makes sense for a pitcher who reached the majors less than a year after pitching in the College World Series.

"From what I've heard from some of the catchers who had him, there's just a calmness this spring," Braves manager **Brian Snitker** said. "It's not such a 'What's going on here?' That's why repetitions, innings—that's what that's about."

Waldrep is again throwing his curveball after ditching it following the draft. He felt good about the pitch during the spring.

"Adding the curveball back gives me a little better tool to lefties," Waldrep said. "It fits my fastball really well out of my arm slot and it just made sense to bring it back."

The idea behind getting rid of the pitch initially was that the Braves wanted Waldrep to focus on his slider, which would play well off his splitter, the pitch for which he's best known.

Waldrep opened the season in Gwinnett rotation, but he will see chances in Atlanta as a spot starter or even a reliever this year.

—GABE BURNS

C Triantos Shows A Knack For Contact

Learning from two of the best defensive middle infielders in the league proved to be advantageous this spring for second baseman **James Triantos**.

Triantos gravitated to shortstop **Dansby Swanson** and second baseman **Nico Hoerner** during spring training. The Gold Glove double-play tandem pulled Triantos aside a couple times while taking ground balls to talk baseball and provide insight.

"They did a really good job just being communicative with how they go about their day, how they prepare themselves, what I can do to be better, be more consistent in general," Triantos said.

"They really helped me out."

Triantos earned his first invite to big league camp this year, where Cubs manager **Craig Counsell** wanted the 22-year-old to learn, listen and seize the experience.

"We want James to continue to really work hard at second base and become as good as he can," Counsell said.

"Offensively, I think James has a profile of high contact—it's a real gift. Picking the right pitches to put in play is a little bit of the next challenge for him."

Triantos impressed in Cactus League action, going 7-for-25 (.280) with two doubles, a triple and a steal in 11 games. He showed an ability to go the other way.

"It's all just timing and taking what the pitcher gives me and being ready to execute what I want to execute," Triantos said. "And wherever the ball goes, my swing takes care of it."

The Cubs went over slot to sign Triantos in the second round in 2021 out of high school. Four years later, he is knocking on the door to Chicago in the wake of a strong 2024 season in which he hit .300/.346/.427 with seven home runs and 47 steals, primarily at Double-A Tennessee.

Triantos reached Triple-A for the first time last year and returns to Iowa this season. His main objective will be to adjust to pitchers who can exploit hitters' weaknesses.

—MEGHAN MONTEMURRO

C Stewart Will Focus On One Position

Third baseman **Sal Stewart** had a strong first half with High-A Dayton last season. His .832 OPS ranked among the Midwest League leaders at the break.

But then he lost the rest of the season with a wrist injury that led to surgery.

This spring, the 21-year-old played in 13 Cactus League games and hit .292/.393/.500 with two doubles and a home run. He also had four walks with five strikeouts as he showed an advanced approach at the plate.

"The biggest thing for Sal in big league camp was that he was himself," Reds senior director of player development **Jeremy Farrell** said.

"He's confident. He went out and he performed, he fit in with that group, put together good at-bats and showed solid defense.

"And I think he'll continue to open eyes."

Ever since being drafted 32nd overall in 2022, Stewart has been known more for his bat than his glove. Last season, he split time between third base and second base.

The plan this year at Double-A Chattanooga is different.

"We're going to give him more time at third base and get him more consistent game action," Farrell said. "We're not going to take second base away from him completely at this point.

"We feel like him continuing to work out there and play there occasionally is good for his athleticism and footwork."

—DOUG GRAY

Thomas' Toughness Shines Through

Outfielder **Jared Thomas** showed the Rockies his toughness and strong desire help his teammates early in his pro career.

He went to Low-A Fresno last season soon after the Rockies drafted him in the second round out of Texas. There, Thomas hit .333/.389/.546 with two home runs but was limited to eight games by a left quad strain that he tried playing through.

The injury proved nagging, so the Rockies sent him to their Arizona complex to rehab. They expected he would be fully ready in instructional league. That wasn't the case, prompting an MRI.

"We get the MRI, and his quad is detached in a place from the bone, which is clearly a very serious injury," Rockies assistant farm director **Jesse Stender** said.

A healthy Thomas began spring training with the Fresno work group. The 21-year-old thought he belonged in the High-A Spokane work group and told Stender and farm director **Chris Forbes**.

"He essentially let his play do his talking from that point forward," Stender said.

Thomas earned his spot with Spokane.

He was an outfielder and first baseman at Texas but now will solely focus on the outfield, where he can play all three positions. Thomas' athleticism suggests he will be a serviceable outfielder.

Thomas has a picturesque lefthanded swing and power to all fields. It's more raw power than game, though he homered twice in a spring game.

At a minimum, Thomas projects to have average overall hitting ability and power.

"He just has a good feel to hit," Stender said. "Uses the whole field. He seems like a very advanced hitter..."

"He's got a good feel for the zone (and has a) comfort level. It doesn't seem like he gets sped up. He gets to two strikes, he still gets off his 'A' swing."

—JACK ETKIN

Rushing Learns To Lead Pitching Staff

The Dodgers are not afraid to think outside the box when developing a catcher.

Drafted in the first round in 2016, **Will Smith** reached Triple-A in 2018 and spent the final month of that season with the big league team.

He wasn't added to the roster as a September callup. Instead, he traveled with



The Brewers developed Josh Hader and Devin Williams into all-stars. Craig Yoho could be their next frontline closer.

the team, participated in game-planning meetings and got a taste of what would be expected of him in Los Angeles.

It was an attempt to speed up the learning process, and it certainly seemed to work for the future all-star.

The Dodgers tried a similar approach with catcher **Dalton Rushing**, a non-roster invitee to big league camp this year.

Rushing was tasked with leading mock meetings with the pitching coaches and game-planning staff, studying scouting reports and then explaining how he would call for pitches against certain hitters.

"It's a hard thing and it's an intimidating experience to come up and be a big part of a meeting where you have these veteran pitchers and a coaching staff that has done this at a high level for so long," Dodgers GM **Brandon Gomes** said.

"So doing everything we can to shorten that learning curve when guys do get here is really important."

Rushing's ability at the plate has created speculation that his path to the big leagues will not be at catcher. He also plays first base and left field with Triple-A Oklahoma City.

But Gomes said that catching needs to be Rushing's "meat and potatoes" to reach the majors.

"(Rushing is) really pouring himself into the defensive side," Gomes said. "The offensive (side) is in a really good place. You can always find tweaks there, but it's very much his receiving, his game-calling."

—BILL PLUNKETT



Slugging Alderman Dials In For A Big 2025

There are a few things different this year about 22-year-old right fielder **Kemp Alderman** at Double-A Pensacola.

Off the field, Alderman got married in the offseason and honeymooned in Antigua.

On the field, the 6-foot-3 Alderman has gotten in better shape. From a high of 255 pounds at Mississippi, he now weighs 235.

"One of my goals this year," Alderman said, "is to be a 20-20 guy."

That sounds audacious considering that Alderman has never stole more than five bases in any college or pro season. Miami drafted him in the second round in 2023.

What Alderman has proven he can do is hit the ball hard. *Really* hard.

In the Arizona Fall League last November he hit a ball 119.5 mph. It was the hardest-hit ball of the AFL season, and it was one of six homers in nine games for the righthanded batter.

"I hardly felt it hit my bat," said Alderman of his signature home run, which he hit off a slider he pulled to left-center field. "When you hit it good, it just feels pure."

One reason Alderman was in the AFL was that he missed April, May and half of June with a fractured left hand. He appeared in 77 total games in 2024, most of them at Low-A Jupiter and High-A Beloit.

He hit .255/.317/.406 with seven homers in 66 games at the two Class A stops.

Alderman also pitched as an amateur

and dabbled as a catcher in high school. In college, he helped Ole Miss win the 2022 College World Series.

This season, Alderman is working on pitch selection.

"With two strikes, I'm trying not to chase," he said. "I'm pretending it's a 3-1 count."

—WALTER VILLA



Yoho Turns Heads In Big League Camp

Craig Yoho ultimately did not make the Brewers' Opening Day roster.

What he did do this spring was turn heads. That in turn paved the way for the reliever to be the first reliever called up from Triple-A Nashville.

The 25-year-old Yoho was one of the breakout stories of camp for the Brewers, who drafted him in the eighth round out of Indiana in 2023.

Coming off a 2024 in which he earned first-team minor league all-star status, Yoho pitched 8.2 spring innings, allowing six hits, walking three and striking out 15.

It's been an incredible rise for the native of Fishers, Ind. He began his college career as a position player at Houston before transferring to Indiana, where he lost 2021 to Tommy John surgery and 2022 to knee surgery before converting to the mound.

Yoho struck out 63 in 27 innings his final year with the Hoosiers before signing for \$10,000 with the Brewers. In his breakout 2024 season he pitched at three levels, struck out 101 and walked 23 in 57.2 innings, notching 10 saves with a 0.94 ERA.

The key has been Yoho's changeup, an offering that is already being compared with former Brewers closer **Devin Williams'** famous "airbender."

Now that Williams is closing games for the Yankees, Yoho is on the list of candidates to one day serve as closer in Milwaukee. But first: a return to Nashville.

"That's a young man with a devastating changeup," Brewers manager **Pat Murphy** said of Yoho this spring. "He throws enough strikes. He seems like a great young man."

"I think he's got a great future."

—TODD ROSIAK



Flamethrower Gomez Prepares For Takeoff

Two years ago, **Raimon Gomez** was the only pitcher in the Mets organization to touch 100 mph.

The righthander was poised for takeoff at High-A Brooklyn in 2023 after opening eyes on the spring training backfields. But then Tommy John surgery grounded him after just three starts.

Gomez missed the entire season and then all of 2024 as well.

This year, the 23-year-old righthander is trying to up the ante. He topped out at 102.8 mph in an early live batting practice session this spring.

"He's sitting more in the 99 (mph) range now, which is where we want him," Mets farm director **Andrew Christie** said. "We have dialed him back a tad."

The reasoning is simple: The Mets want to keep Gomez healthy and progressing toward Queens, because they believe he has some of the best stuff in the organization.

His journey begins in the Low-A St. Lucie rotation this year as he ramps up activity for the first time in two years.

Gomez sits in the high 90s with his four-seam fastball and in the mid 80s with a slider that befuddles hitters gearing up for heat. He throws a changeup sparingly and has tried a cutter in the past.

Like many Mets pitchers, Gomez has recently added a two-seam fastball.

"The four-seam and slider are his bread-and-butter," Christie said. "His two-seam is relatively new. When you throw that hard, the pitch is going in on righties hard. He picked that up pretty quickly."

Gomez signed out of Venezuela in 2021. At age 19, he was considered to be a passed-over international prospect.

He was passed over again in last winter's Rule 5 draft, which is defensible considering he hadn't pitched since early 2023 and was not throwing in winter ball.

Still, the Mets breathed a sigh of relief when Gomez went unselected.

While losing two development years was not ideal, Gomez attacked his rehab and dramatically improved his physical condition. The Mets see other signs of maturity.

This year, Gomez's wife and young daughter are living with him.

"He's in a really good spot," Christie said.

—MATT EDDY

P Saltiban Takes Quickly To Infield

Devin Saltiban wants to learn as much as he can.

The 20-year-old was an outfielder in high school in Hawaii. The 2023 second-rounder has transitioned to the infield in pro ball.



An outfielder in high school in Hawaii, Devin Saltiban is now a second baseman on the rise in the Phillies' system.

In his first full pro season last year, Saltiban played 88 games at second base for Low-A Clearwater. He also started at second for the Phillies' Spring Breakout game against the Pirates and hit an RBI double.

Saltiban's desire to improve has been key to his adjustment, according to Phillies minor league infield coordinator **Adam Everett**.

"You watch him now on the infield and he looks like he's been out there his whole life, which is really a testament to him, because he really has worked hard," Everett said.

Saltiban did it all while also adjusting to a much higher level of play than he was accustomed to in high school.

He didn't have much experience with facing high velocity in Hawaii, but he acclimated quickly in the Florida State League, where he hit .237/.346/.428 with 17 home runs as a 19-year-old.

Saltiban also showed off some speed, stealing 22 bases.

"I don't even think he's come close to scratching the surface," Everett said.

The Phillies tested him out at shortstop for a few games shortly after he was drafted in 2023, but Everett thinks Saltiban has found his long-term home at second base.

The next step for the 5-foot-9 righthanded hitter is to continue to get reps, and continue to ask questions about his craft at High-A Jersey Shore.

"Hopefully when he gets to the big leagues one of these days, he can go, 'Yep, I made that mistake. I'm not going to do it again,'" Everett said.

"Or, 'Hey, this didn't work for me down there, where this did. So I can really kind of lean on that.'"

"He just needs to play, needs to gain experience. The more experience he can get, the better this kid's gonna be."

—LOCHLAHN MARCH

P Valdez Aims To Control The Zone

Esmerlyn Valdez parlayed a Florida State League-best 22 home runs in 2024 with Low-A Bradenton into an appearance in the annual Spring Breakout, where he picked up one of four hits for the Pirates.

It's an experience the corner outfielder and first baseman will not soon forget.

"Happy for the opportunity to play in the Breakout," he said through interpreter **Juan Guerra**. "Happy the Pirates gave me the opportunity to play. It is something I'm going to keep in my mind for the rest of my life, for the rest of my career."

It was an earned opportunity. Valdez was one of four Pirates minor league players to hit at least 20 home runs and was by far the youngest.

He'll play the entire 2025 season at 21 years old and is already putting up exit velocity numbers befitting of an established major leaguer.

The righthanded-hitting Dominican has legitimate power in his bat, something that's rare in the Pirates' system.

There's still work to be done in terms of making more consistent contact. Valdez struck out 133 times last year in 107 games with Bradenton—a 30.5% rate.

The main struggle has been with sliders, which was the focus of offseason work in each of the last two winters.

Valdez believes he's ready to take that step with his production. He felt he did a good job against sliders this spring and is prepared to see them at High-A Greensboro.

When it comes to taking that next step in his development, the goal is simple.

"Not only for this season, but for the rest of my career, it's to have better control of the strike zone, to make good swings," Valdez said, "and to keep working so I can accomplish everything in my career."

—ANTHONY MURPHY



Roby Opens Eyes With 'Electric' Arm

It was a week or so into major league spring training when Cardinals manager **Oliver Marmol** delivered praise for how 23-year-old righthander **Tekoah Roby's** fastball caught coaches' eyes almost as swiftly as it defied hitters.

"One of the most electric arms in camp," Marmol said.

And then he dropped the caveat.

"If he's healthy—really interesting arm."

One of the prize acquisitions from St. Louis' 2023 trade deadline dealing, Roby was on the Double-A injured list at the time of his trade from the Rangers. He spent much of 2024 on the IL, too.

Entering this season, Roby had made just 14 starts for Cardinals affiliates system because of elbow and shoulder injuries. At spring training this year, some of the changes he has made were clear.

He added strength, adjusted his routines, focused on a regimen designed to maintain health and had not lost any zip on his fastball. The pitch touches 98 mph, and in bullpen his fastball had an elite vertical break of 20–21 inches.

"I'm a pitcher who is always going to have his fastball," Roby said. "I like to attack hitters with it. It is a relentless attack of the zone."

His snappy breaking ball drew praise in Grapefruit League games.

To prepare for 2025, Roby sought help from a training facility. He benefited from motion-capture tech of his delivery and a rethinking of his preparation. That includes limits on his throws between starts. And the early results were strong.

The Cardinals assigned Roby to Double-A Springfield, but they are open to him moving swiftly to the Triple-A Memphis rotation—or higher as a reliever.

Roby said he has the same-old fastball but completely new outlook.

"It came down to me not really feeling super confident in who I was," he said of the interruptions for injuries. "What we did . . . was build a foundation. It's like a true north. I can return to this. It's peace of mind that this is who I am."

—DERRICK GOOLD



Rodriguez Could Be Bullpen Option In 2025

For two years, righthander **Bradley Rodriguez**'s elbow barked in some shape or form.

He stepped back between the lines in 2024 after a steady dose of rest and rehab, cruised through three levels and appears to be knocking on the door to San Diego after turning heads in big league camp.

"He's got a really plus heater," Padres manager **Mike Shildt** said. "The slider's really nasty. I love his demeanor. I love his presence on the mound, like the body language, the aggressiveness with which he pitches.

"He's in attack mode, which is what we like to see out of our athletes."

The 21-year-old struck out three batters in three perfect innings in Cactus League play before an illness sidelined him.

Rodriguez allowed two runs on four hits in one inning in his return to action on March 10 and allowed another run on two hits in the ninth inning of the Padres' Spring Breakout game.

Signed for \$370,000 out of Venezuela in 2021, Rodriguez's fastball sits in the high 90s and can touch 101 mph with life up in the zone. He pairs that pitch with a hard slider and a plus changeup that has improved dramatically as a pro.

After a two-year hiatus, Rodriguez struck out 75 batters in 61.1 innings to go with a 2.64 ERA. He rose from Low-A Lake Elsinore to High-A Fort Wayne to Double-A San Antonio, where he returned this season.

A stint in the Venezuelan League preceded last year's meteoric rise.

"I think to be able to see the caliber of hitters in that (winter) league really gave me a lot of confidence when I got here," Rodriguez said through a team interpreter. "I think that's what really helped me in my trajectory getting to Double-A . . .

"I have the confidence in myself that it



The Nationals' Alex Clemmey added a weapon to his repertoire: a refined delivery that helps him throw more strikes.

really doesn't matter who I'm facing. I know that I trust my stuff. I know that I have what it takes to be successful.

"So, no disrespect to any batters out there, but I'm confident in my stuff."

—JEFF SANDERS



Comfortable Ceballos Salvages Season

Until the Braves traded **Sabin Ceballos** to the Giants in the late-July deal in which Atlanta reacquired **Jorge Soler** and **Luke Jackson**, the third baseman had put together a middling 2024 season.

He had hit .259/.353/.354 with three home runs in 85 games with High-A Rome. Once Ceballos joined the Giants' High-A Eugene affiliate, something clicked for him.

He improved his OPS by more than 200 points and hit seven homers in 32 games.

Farm director **Kyle Haines** said the Giants made "some really minor changes" to Ceballos at the plate to "maybe free him up a little bit in the batter's box and make him feel comfortable."

The native Puerto Rican spent his junior season of college at Oregon in 2023—the Braves drafted him in the third round that year—so Ceballos figured to feel more comfortable not only in a familiar city but also at PK Park, where the Ducks also play.

"I think that helped him a lot," Haines said.

Listed at 6-foot-3, 225 pounds, the

righthanded-hitting Ceballos has "a well-rounded approach, power to all fields," Haines said.

"We saw that this spring, driving the ball to right-center field, to left-center field."

Ceballos received 15 at-bats in Cactus League action and recorded nine hits.

"Yeah, it was a small amount of at-bats," Haines said, "but it's hard to go 9-for-15 in high school, let alone in major league baseball."

Ceballos' defense "is always going to be the big question mark," Haines said but then offered a more promising assessment.

"I'd say his defense, between the time we got him and now, has improved the most. He's made some really, really nice plays in major league camp.

"And I think if he continues to trend this way, he has a chance to be average or slightly above at third."

Haines said the fallback option for Ceballos would be to move to first base. He opened the season at Double-A Richmond.

"He'd be a plus first baseman right now," Haines said, "but our hope is to keep him at third base."

—STEVE KRONER



Clemmey Sees Results From 'Quieter' Delivery

Soon after lefthander **Alex Clemmey** joined the Nationals organization, he helped Low-A Fredericksburg win the 2024 Carolina

League championship.

He continued to impress this spring as he struck out six Mets while allowing one run in three innings in a Spring Breakout game.

"Being able to win a championship my first year was special," the 19-year-old Clemmey said. "We had a great clubhouse with great energy, and we went all out to win it. It was great to do that my first year, but I look forward to many more."

The Nationals acquired Clemmey from the Guardians along with infielders **Jose Tena** and **Rafael Ramirez Jr.** last July 29 for outfielder **Lane Thomas**.

The 6-foot-6, 205-pound Clemmey pitched all of last year in the Carolina League, striking out 123 and walking 63 in 92.1 innings between Lynchburg and Fredericksburg.

He smoothed out his delivery with help from his longtime personal pitching coach **John DeRouin** and from the Nationals' pitching coaches.

Cleveland drafted Clemmey in the second round in 2023 out of Bishop Hendricken High in Warwick, R.I. He throws his four-seam fastball and new sinker in the mid-to-high 90s and his slider and change-up in the mid-to-high 80s.

"Everyone knows my slider is my put-away pitch," he said. "But really in high school, it was my fastball because it touched 100 (mph)."

DeRouin, now the director of pitching performance and strategy for the University of Arizona, formerly worked in Rhode Island and then as the Tigers' rehab pitching coordinator. He has known Clemmey for about five years.

"He's been the main man for me," Clemmey said. "He has helped me with every single aspect of life."

This past offseason, Clemmey went to Arizona to work on his delivery as he prepared to move up to High-A Wilmington.

"I just think it's a little more refined, quieter," he said. "I've been able to simplify it where it's smooth and effortless and I can still produce high velocity."

"Once I'm ahead in the count, I'm in the driver's seat. That's where I put myself in position to be consistent."

Clemmey chose pro ball over a Vanderbilt offer, and his brother **Patrick** is now a Vanderbilt recruit in this year's high school class.

"He's a lefty, too," Clemmey said. "Everyone in the family is lefthanded. We get known for that lefty craziness, but it's a good craziness for sure."

—LACY LUSK

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Division II transfer outfielder Jackson Hauge led Kansas in home runs.

COLLEGE

LAYING A FOUNDATION

How **Kansas** used junior college transfers to build a top 25 program

by JACOB RUDNER

When Dan Fitzgerald first walked into his office at the University of Kansas in June 2022, the room was mostly bare—no trophies, no glossy recruiting boards, no illusion of inherited momentum.

Just a desk and a program in pieces.

Kansas had just suffered its sixth losing season since 2010. Its roster was splintering thanks to players exiting through the transfer portal at a high rate. In the weight room, dust settled where energy should've been. Empty lockers echoed like warnings. It had been nearly a decade since the Jayhawks last reached the NCAA Tournament, and just five times in the previous 59 years had they earned that opportunity at all.

Fitzgerald, fresh off a season as recruiting coordinator at LSU, understood immediately: Tradition wasn't going to save Kansas. Neither was flash. What Kansas needed, and what it lacked, was an identity.

"We're certainly not the Yankees," Fitzgerald said, a half-laugh catching in his throat—less humor, more acknowledgment of the truth.

At a school defined by basketball prestige and a football program on the rise, baseball sat somewhere in between—visible, but hardly prioritized. Kansas wasn't in the NIL arms race. It didn't have all the bells and whistles. And Fitzgerald, in his first Power Four head coaching job, wasn't interested in pretending it did.

There would be no shortcuts. No dramatic flips of the transfer portal's elite. If Kansas was going to rise, it would have to do so on the backs of players no one else saw coming.

"It was very clear that we weren't going to be able to do this conventionally," Fitzgerald said. "We had to be different."

That clarity—equal parts warning and rallying cry—set the tone.

So Fitzgerald turned inward, back toward the version of the game that had forged him. Back to the fields with uneven grass and no lights and buses that broke down. Back to junior college.

He wasn't alone. His staff—recruiting coordinator Jon Coyne, pitching coach Brandon Scott and hitting coach Tyler Hancock—shared that same DNA. All of them knew what that world offered: maturity, hunger, perspective. It wasn't just a recruiting strategy. It was a culture.

So the foundation was laid. Not with stars, but with the unheralded. Not with potential, but with purpose.

Two years later, Kansas has quietly authored one of the more remarkable, if underreported, turnarounds in college baseball thanks in part to the most junior college transfers in Division I: Nineteen players stitched together by grit, hunger and belief.

The plan, at first glance, looked improvised. Players departed en masse, leaving gaping holes on the depth chart. Fitzgerald and his staff had to build a team—not over time, but right away.

That urgency could've produced panic. Instead, it produced alignment.

"When Fitz asked me, 'If you were the recruiting coordinator at Kansas, how would you do it?' I told him: juco kids," Coyne said. "And he goes,



'Good, because I just took the job five minutes ago. Want to come with?'"

When Jon Coyne runs through the Rolodex of junior college coaches in his head, it's not just names and numbers—it's fingerprints. He knows what kind of players each program produces. How they train. How they carry themselves. And what kind of habits they bring with them.

Kurt Russell at Western Oklahoma State?

"Super tough, super gritty," Coyne said of Russell's players. "They're going to be on time. They're never going to be late to the bus. They're going to work so hard. And they're going to say 'yes, sir, no sir' and 'thank you.' They're the

best, and they're good players too."

And Todd Inglehart with 900 career wins and counting at Arizona's Cochise College?

"He's one of the best coaches I've ever seen at any level coaching the game," Coyne said. "Maybe one of the best pitch-callers and in-game managers I've seen at any level. I played against him when he was coaching at Cochise. Discipline. His players are disciplined and mature."

Kansas bets on that pedigree.

"The baseball is pure," Coyne said. "The coaches care. The players are competitive."

And, just as importantly, they're grateful.

"If you talk to some of the best high school guys out there, some will tell you they're getting offers of like \$100,000 if you commit right now,"

Coyne said. “Then you talk to the juco guy and he’s like, ‘Dude, you guys got lights? You have turf?’ And I just sit there like, ‘Dude, I know. Lights. Field turf.’ Juco guys, that’s just us.”

That mentality has helped shape one of the most unique roster constructions in college baseball.

Of the 39 players on Kansas’ 2025 roster, 30 are in at least their third year at the college level. But just three are true freshmen. As many as 14 are in their final year of eligibility, barring any last-minute rulings from the NCAA that might restore a junior college season to their clocks.

The approach demands a high tolerance for roster turnover, which Kansas has embraced.

“If you go out there and start shooting a bunch of threes early in the game, you’re kind of committed to shooting threes for the rest of the game,” Fitzgerald said, likening his team’s recruiting makeup to basketball scoring theory.

“Recruiting the way we do is shooting from the distance. The reward is huge, but so is the risk. We’re fortunate that we’re making a lot of shots right now.”

Home run leader Jackson Hauge was a steal from Division II Minnesota State. Batting average leader Brady Ballinger, who ranks second in homers, came from the College of Southern Nevada, the juco program that Bryce Harper once attended.

And stolen base leader Derek Cerda? One of the Western Oklahoma State guys Coyne talked about.

In total, five of Kansas’ nine regular lineup spots are filled by players who didn’t come from Division I. Six of the 13 pitchers who’ve thrown at least 10 innings this year fit the same profile.

And it’s working.

As of April 7, Kansas held a 27–6 overall record and a 9–3 mark in Big 12 Conference play—both program bests at that point in the season. The Jayhawks rank in the top 15 nationally in scoring, home runs, on-base percentage and slugging. They are among the top 45 in ERA. On the April 7 edition of the Top 25, they had moved up to No. 19, their highest mark in years.

From 50,000 feet, Kansas’ success might seem surprising. To the people on the ground, it’s anything but.

“The portal has allowed people to stay older,” Coyne said. “If we were talking recruiting six years ago or whenever the portal really opened, then it’s a different ballgame. But the ballgame now, you can stay old if you want. The mechanics of recruiting now have changed. When you make your roster old, you stay old. Generally, you have to replace experience with experience.”

The results back up the strategy. In today’s college game, age isn’t just an advantage—it’s often the difference.

Players who were in their final year of eligi-



bility in 2024 accounted for 37.8% of Division I at-bats, while freshmen and redshirt freshmen trailed them markedly at just 12.6%. Older players widely outperformed their younger counterparts in every category at the plate, too.

Class	AVG	OBP	AB/HR
Freshman	.262	.369	38.4
Sophomore	.277	.379	29.2
Junior	.282	.386	28.7
Senior	.286	.390	27.6

The same can be said on the mound.

Class	ERA	SO/9	BB/9
Freshman	6.95	8.19	5.72
Sophomore	6.20	8.47	4.90
Junior	6.14	8.57	4.81
Senior	5.97	8.28	4.45

Simply put, Kansas has bought into the math. And it believes that math gives the program a chance, even if there isn’t a large sample size of teams that have successfully navigated college athletics this way given the newness of the strategy and the forces that have made it a necessity for some.

“We’re buying into physical and mental maturity and the notion that, basically, our older player who’s been through some things and has experience can beat a team’s younger player who might have higher long-term upside but needs time to get to it,” Fitzgerald said.

“We have a bunch of dudes who are hungry and who know what it takes already to win.”

Kansas has chased players who had seen the bottom, worked through it and were eager for one more chance to prove they belonged. Because the Jayhawks’ coaches spoke that language, they knew how to find players who did, too.

“Brandon played in it, Tyler played in it, Ryan Holland played in it,” Coyne said. “I played and coached in it. We already had that blood. We knew what it produced.”

They don’t have a motto printed on T-shirts or a mantra painted across the clubhouse wall. But ask anyone inside Kansas’ dugout what makes this team work, and they’ll give you the same answer. Humility, unity and simplicity.

“I tell them all the time, if you want to wear different color shoelaces and get cool tattoos and put your native country’s flag on your glove, go for it,” Fitzgerald said. “But you have to be a great—you have to be an unbelievable teammate. Not an average teammate, not a good teammate. Like, you have to be an unbelievable teammate.”

There are no impenetrably thick rulebooks in Lawrence. Just that lone expectation: Think more about your teammates than you think about yourself. Treat practice like it matters. Honor the moment you’re in. The rest is noise.

Left: Juco transfer outfielder Derek Cerda provides a key speed component to the Jayhawks.

Above: “We had to be different,” Kansas coach Dan Fitzgerald said of his program’s focus on junior college transfers.

Departments

"We're pretty simple, man," Fitzgerald said. "We're straightforward. You'd be incredibly disappointed at our lack of creativity."

That might sound self-deprecating, but it's not. It's the opposite. In a sport driven by chaos—one pitch, one bounce, one call changing everything—the Jayhawks have rooted themselves in the one thing they can control—each other.

"We keep it really centered on the humility they show toward one another," Fitzgerald said. "And I think that starts with my staff. They're just the best. There's kind of a shared like-mindedness of, 'Hey, we're all moving in the same direction together.'"

It's not chemistry for chemistry's sake. It's survival. Because the blueprint Kansas is utilizing requires instant buy-in. There's no time to gel by May. It had to happen fast.

And it did.

Coyne believes players would tell you the coaching staff feels like best friends and that that sense of alignment, of unbreakable trust, trickles down.

"You can't fake it," Coyne said. "Players will sense it. Parents will sense it. If there's division on the staff, they'll read it in two seconds."

At Kansas, those cracks don't exist. Not publicly or privately. There are hard conversations, yes, but always for the right reasons.

"We're hand to hand, shoulder to shoulder, the whole time," Coyne said. "That's how we've done it. That's how we'll keep doing it."

For Fitzgerald, the win-loss record doesn't define this season. Not even an NCAA Tournament appearance will do that, even with the team tracking toward one of its best years ever.

What matters more is that the program is moving forward, not just in rankings, but in identity.

"My goal every year is that our team somehow overachieves," Fitzgerald said. "I think it's the greatest thing you can ever do with a team—get more out of your team than maybe you had in the tank to begin with."

So when a walk-off win unfolds, Fitzgerald isn't sprinting to the plate. He's standing still, in the dugout, watching it all unfold, taking in the unspoken moments that have defined what Kansas baseball has become.

"I have incredible joy watching them experience that together," he said. ■



SEC PUSHES FOR 12—OR MORE—NCAA TOURNAMENT BIDS

The Southeastern Conference has long been synonymous with excellence in college baseball.

Yet as the calendar inches toward June, the conversation around the SEC's dominance isn't merely about its tradition, but how much more potent it's become.

With Texas and Oklahoma now folded into an already-stacked league, the SEC's modern form may be its most intimidating yet. Twelve of its 16 programs have reached the College World Series since 2021—the highest hit rate of any Power Five conference—including the Pac-12—since the NCAA adopted the 64-team tournament format in 1999.

That number isn't just a statistic. It's a reflection of a conference that has not only elevated the national standard but also reshaped expectations for what's possible.

"I think from my perspective, the top of the league and the strength there has been really impressive," said a high-ranking SEC official. "You're facing a few top five, top 10 teams in the country, back to back to back."

"I don't know who would have success when you're up against that, other than the teams we have in our league."

In the SEC, even a fringe contender can look mortal when the schedule lines up wrong. One early stumble—especially in the gauntlet of league play—can spiral into something more daunting, more defining.

The numbers back up the perception.

Last year, the league set a new benchmark with 11 teams earning NCAA Tournament bids. In 2025, that number could go even higher.

"There's still a path for 11, 12, 13 at this point," the official said in mid-April. "Could we get it up to 12, 13, 14 this year with the 16-team league? I don't know about 14 necessarily, but there's a path."

That depth has translated not just into postseason berths, but also into top-end seeding.

"You're looking at the potential for like six national seeds from one conference," the official added. "I would have to imagine that is unheard of."

The strength of the SEC is visible in its raw numbers, but also in the way it sharpens its teams.

Through Week 9 of the 2025 season, SEC offenses had:

■ Posted a combined .919 OPS

■ Ten of its teams with isolated slugging percentages over .200

■ Five ranked among the top 50 nationally in scoring

■ Ten ranked among the top 50 in home runs

■ Nine among the top 50 in ERA.

"You go through this league both just competitively and then also from an environment standpoint," the official said. "It's the iron-sharpens-iron thing. Some of those competitive atmospheres in the postseason can be even a step down at times from what you've experienced going through the regular season."

Even with the addition of two new teams, that tone hasn't changed. It's only intensified.

Thirteen of the 25 champions since 1999 now play in the SEC, which has produced each of the last five College World Series winners.

"Obviously, we knew coming in (that) both programs had an extensive history," the official said of Texas and Oklahoma. "There was every anticipation that they were going to come in and kind of fit right in and be an equal competitor with all of our other programs."

It's not without drawbacks. The sheer difficulty of the league means some teams with postseason-worthy rosters risk being buried in the standings before April ends.

In 2025, Florida and Mississippi State have trudged through conference play despite opening the season ranked No. 7 and 18 nationally. Earning a postseason berth will be a challenge for both.

With the strength at the top of the conference, any weaknesses quickly get exposed.

"If you're down a weekend starter or two, it makes room for error—which is already razor-thin—even more narrow," the official said.

Still, the conference sees promise in where it's going.

One new development this season is the SEC tournament format, which now includes all 16 teams and adopts a single-elimination structure.

"We're looking forward to the conference tournament—the first year all teams are invited," the official said. "Just to kind of see how that manifests from a fan engagement and excitement standpoint."

The SEC's sustained dominance has even sparked conversations about fairness: How many teams should one league be allowed to send?

And while that question remains unanswered, the SEC has already made one thing abundantly clear: It's not chasing anyone anymore. It's firmly at the head of the pack.

"Last year, we broke through what felt like it was a little bit of a ceiling with getting that 11th team in there," the official said. "It had been something that we had been trying to get across the finish line for several years. And it just led to: 'How far can we take it?'"

—Jacob Rudner

EDDIE KELLY

MINORS

HEAT WAVE

Elite fastball velocity puts the Mets' Raimon Gomez on a fast track

by J.J. COOPER

Low-A St. Lucie righthander Raimon Gomez threw the fastest tracked pitch in pro ball this year when he fired a 104.5 mph fastball to strike out Carlos Sanchez on April 26.

This wasn't a one-pitch bolt out of the blue for the 23-year-old Mets prospect. In that same game, Gomez's fastball sat 101.8 mph and he threw eight pitches 103 mph or harder.

To that point in the season, Gomez had thrown seven of the 10 fastest pitches in Statcast-equipped parks—covering MLB, Triple-A and the Florida State League—in 2025. Just two pitches by Athletics closer Mason Miller (103.7 and 103.2 mph) and one by Red Sox closer Aroldis Chapman (103.4) interloped on Gomez's fastball dominance.

This isn't a shocking development of new-found velocity for Gomez. He showed a great arm before having Tommy John surgery in 2023, and he was highlighted as a prospect to watch for the Rule 5 draft last offseason.

But his ability to get to 104 mph puts him in rarefied air, where he's virtually assured of having at least some sort of MLB career.

We can document 30 other pitchers who have touched at least 102 mph in the minor leagues since 2021. Of those, 21 have pitched in the major leagues.

That list includes Miller, Twins closer Jhoan Duran, Orioles closer Felix Bautista and Giants high-leverage reliever Camilo Doval. Starters Hunter Greene, Paul Skenes and Joe Boyle also make the list.

There are a larger number of relievers who range from bullpen fixtures—Brusdar Graterol, Justin Martinez, Jose Marte—to up-and-down arms, such as Alex Speas, Julian Fernandez and Junior Fernandez.

Of the eight who have not pitched in the majors, another four are ranked prospects in the upper levels of the minors who can be expected to reach MLB this season.

Only one of those 30 never reached the majors and is no longer in an MLB organization: Melvin Adon.

What's notable about this is we haven't controlled for anything other than top-of-the-scale velocity. There's no cutoff to ignore wild flamethrowers with high walk rates. The

straightest four-seam fastball makes the cut. A pitcher who can't stay healthy but touched 102 mph makes the list.

With only one standout trait, a pitcher is highly likely to be a major leaguer. There aren't many individual attributes that yield a stronger correlation to reaching the big leagues than elite velocity.

A pitcher with outlier fastball velocity becomes a near shoo-in for the big leagues, partly because he will keep getting chances to figure things out when he fails.

MLB organizations have other options if they're looking for control artists. They have many pitchers who can spin a quality breaking ball. But even in an era when velocity can be improved with training, few pitchers can throw 102 mph. So when such a pitcher struggles, he'll get another shot. And another, and eventually he may start to figure things out.

We have historical data to prove this as well. In 2016, Baseball America gathered every minor league pitcher who threw a pitch at least 100 mph that season. All in all, there were 71 pitchers who touched 100 that we could document, as sourced from BA's reporting.

Of those 71 pitchers, 47 (66%) would go on to pitch in the major leagues. Of the 23 who touched 101 mph, 17 (74%) would pitch in the majors. Of the 11 who touched at least 102 mph, 10 (91%) pitched in the majors.

When we did a similar list of 100 mph minor leaguers in 2018, we found 77 pitchers who touched triple-digits. Of those, 68 (88%) would go on to pitch in the majors in some role.

Some of those pitchers had brief MLB careers. Some would go on to be stars. But the point stands: Extreme velocity is a strong indicator of a pitcher bound to be a future big leaguer.

The Mets started Gomez in the Low-A rotation this season to get him reacclimated with a pro routine after he lost most of 2023 and all of 2024. With his outlier velocity, he is a likely future big leaguer. The biggest question is how quickly he can move.

Last year, Dodgers righthander Edgardo Henriquez and his 103 mph fastball went from Low-A to the major league bullpen in the span of a season. Gomez could be on a similar fast track, most likely as a reliever. ■



Mets prospect Raimon Gomez topped 104 mph in an April start for Low-A St. Lucie.

THE 102 MPH CLUB *Minor league pitchers -2021-2025*

Pitcher	Current role
Abner Uribe	Brewers reliever
Alex Speas	Twins Triple-A; has pitched in MLB in two bullpens
Brusdar Graterol	Dodgers setup man
Camilo Doval	Giants setup man/closer
Daniel Palencia	Cubs reliever
Edgar Isea	D-backs High-A reliever
Edgardo Henriquez	Dodgers reliever (IL with fractured foot)
Emiliano Teodo	Rangers preseason No. 4 prospect
Felix Bautista	Orioles closer
Gregory Santos	Mariners reliever
Hunter Greene	Reds ace
Jarlin Susana	Nationals preseason No. 3 prospect
Jhoan Duran	Twins closer
Joe Boyle	Rays Triple-A starter; has made two MLB starts
Joel Peguero	Giants Triple-A
Jose Marte	Angels reliever
Julian Fernandez	Dodgers Triple-A; has pitched in Rockies bullpen
Junior Fernandez	Royals Triple-A; has pitched in Cardinals bullpen
Justin Martinez	D-backs closer
Luis Medina	A's starter (IL after having Tommy John surgery)
Luis Mey	Reds preseason No. 16 prospect, made MLB debut on 5/1
Mason Miller	Athletics closer
Melvin Adon	Released
Michel Otañez	A's reliever (IL with shoulder impingement)
Paul Skenes	Pirates ace
Raimon Gomez	Mets preseason No. 26 prospect
Reynaldo Yean	Dodgers preseason No. 30 prospect
Sam Knowlton	D-backs High-A reliever
Seth Halvorsen	Rockies reliever
Will Klein	Mariners Triple-A; eight MLB appearances last year.
Zach Maxwell	Reds preseason No. 15 prospect

MIKE JAMES/FOUR SEAM IMAGES

DRAFT

BALANCING ACT

Scouting departments grade the 2025 draft class, a well-rounded group light on future stars

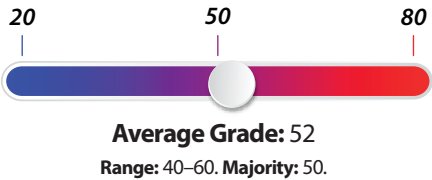
by CARLOS COLLAZO

For the fifth straight year, we’ve asked MLB scouting departments to grade the quality of the draft on a 20–80 scale. As part of our preseason All-America balloting, we asked scouting directors how they viewed the strength of the 2025 draft class in an attempt to quantify their opinions on the group and more accurately compare drafts from year to year. Here’s how a dozen scouting directors graded this year’s class:



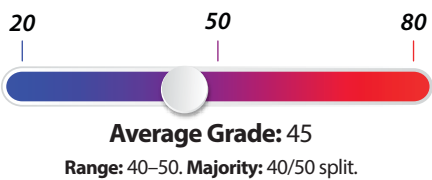
Florida State lefthander Jaime Arnold

Overall Talent



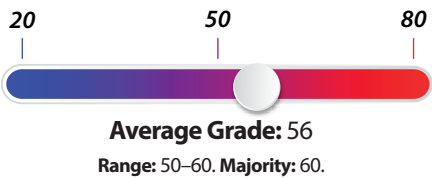
This is the most generic and vague category, which should best capture the overall view of a given draft class. More scouting directors view this class as plus (three) than who view it as below-average (one), but the bulk of responses (eight) see this as an average draft class. Grading the overall class as average was the largest majority response of this year’s poll.

Impact Talent



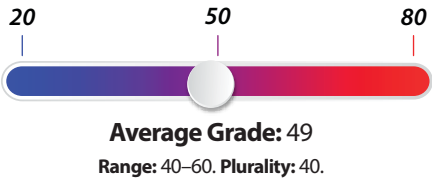
The industry is torn on the impact talent of the class, with half seeing it as average and half seeing it as below-average. There is a clear group of players at the top of the class currently—including Florida State lefthander Jamie Arnold, Oklahoma high school shortstop Ethan Holliday, UC Santa Barbara righthander Tyler Bremner, California high school righthander Seth Hernandez and Oregon State shortstop Aiva Arquette—but each player has his flaws. There’s not an Adley Rutschman or Dylan Crews type of headliner currently.

Overall Depth



This is the strongest individual category of this year’s draft, according to our experts. While this 56 grade doesn’t quite reach the plus depth grades received by the post-pandemic drafts from 2021 to 2023, it is above-average and the loudest “tool” of the class as of this spring.

College Pitching



While a plurality of directors (five) view the college pitching crop as below-average, there are enough who view the college arms as plus (four) or average (three) to push the class up to an average grade in the aggregate. Top-of-the-class arms Jamie Arnold and Tyler Bremner don’t have the electricity that Chase Burns and Hagen Smith boasted a year ago, but they have safer starting profiles at the same time. There is no shortage of college arms who look like roughly third-round talents at the moment but could use a strong season to boost their stock on draft day.

- Top Three**
- 1. Jamie Arnold, LHP, Florida State
 - 2. Tyler Bremner, RHP, UC Santa Barbara
 - 3. Liam Doyle, LHP, Tennessee

EDDIE KELLY (ARNOLD, HOLLIDAY); BILL MITCHELL (ARQUETTE); TRACY PROFFITT (FOUR SEAM IMAGES (HERNANDEZ))

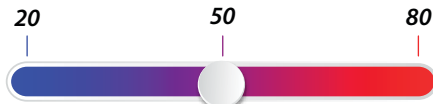


Oklahoma
high school
shortstop
Ethan Holliday



California prep
righthander
Seth
Hernandez

College Hitting



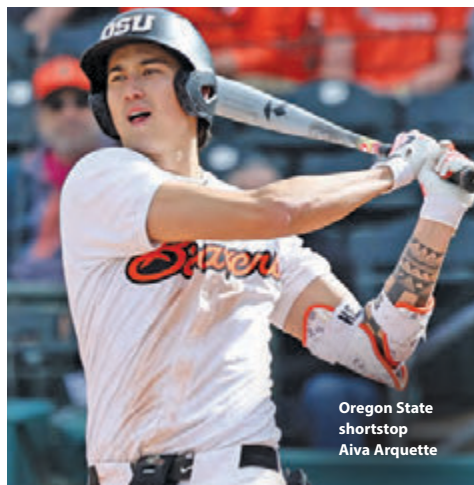
Average Grade: 50

Range: 40–60. Plurality: 50.

Half the directors viewed the college hitting class as average, while the other half was torn between plus or below-average. There is plenty of power in this year's class—which could be a function of college baseball's overheated offensive environment—but there are fewer pure hitters of the caliber of the likes of Travis Bazzana, JJ Wetherholt or Nick Kurtz.

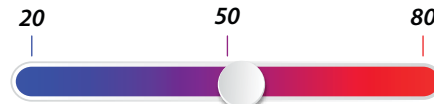
Top Three

1. Aiva Arquette, SS, Oregon State
2. Marek Houston, SS, Wake Forest
3. Dean Curley, SS, Tennessee



Oregon State
shortstop
Aiva Arquette

High School Hitting



Average Grade: 52

Range: 40–60.

Plurality: 50.

Directors view the high school hitting demographic as the strongest of the four, with half the directors calling it an average class, four calling it plus and just two calling it below-average. There's both quality and quantity, with lots of shortstop capital to be found inside the first round, though Stillwater (Okla.) High Ethan Holliday doesn't quite reach the sort of elite Bobby Witt Jr. status as a standout high school headliner.

Top Three

1. Ethan Holliday, SS, Stillwater, Okla.
2. Billy Carlson, SS, Corona, Calif.
3. Xavier Neyens, 3B, Mount Vernon, Wash.

In Conclusion

Here's how the 2025 class stacks up when we put all the grades together and round each category to the nearest half-grade:

Overall: 50 (average)

Impact: 45 (fringe-average)

Depth: 55 (above-average)

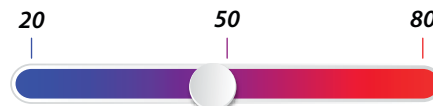
College Pitching: 50 (average)

College Hitting: 50 (average)

High School Pitching: 50 (average)

High School Hitting: 50 (average)

High School Pitching



Average Grade: 48

Range: 40–60. Majority: 40/50 split.

The high school pitching crop narrowly loses out to college pitching for the worst individually graded section of the draft. But it still rounds to an average class overall with a handful (two) of directors being a bit more bullish and slapping a plus grade on the group. Corona (Calif.) High righthander Seth Hernandez is a headliner who matches the likes of Dylan Lesko, Jackson Jobe and Andrew Painter of recent years, but Kruz Schoolcraft might be the only other no-doubt prep first-round pitching talent right now.

Top Three

1. Seth Hernandez, RHP, Corona, Calif.
2. Kruz Schoolcraft, LHP, Portland, Ore.
3. Cameron Appenzeller, LHP, Chatham, Ill.

While the 2025 group doesn't have the sort of top-of-the-class talent to get the industry fired up, it is a well-rounded and deep group of players with no clear weakness.

The 2025 group is definitely ahead of the 2024 class at the same point a year ago. The 2024 group was viewed as fringe-average with overall and impact talent and just average in depth. That class also featured both high school demographics with below-average grades.

The 2025 draft joins the 2023 class as only the second in our five years of this exercise to not have a single demographic below a 50. However, directors gave both the college and high school hitters 55 grades in 2023, while the 2025 class is straight 50s across the board.

While the 2025 class seems to have enough talent to keep teams busy on both days of the draft, scouts will be looking for a handful of players to take a step forward and cement themselves as no-doubt top-of-the-class headliners on draft day. ■

INTERNATIONAL

WORLD FARE

Which MLB organizations are signing the most international prospects?

by BEN BADLER

One of the biggest challenges in evaluating international signing classes is how long it takes for players to become productive major leaguers. Teams sign players from Latin America as young as 16, so even a player who reaches the major leagues at age 23 could spend six or seven years in the minor leagues. Players like Juan Soto or Vladimir Guerrero Jr., who reach the majors by age 19 or 20, are rare exceptions.

Even then, an MLB debut is just the beginning. At that point, we still don't know what level of production the player will provide over the next several years of team control. It can take more than a decade to fully evaluate how a team fared in a given international signing class.

In the meantime, we can check the temperature of how teams have done on the international market by tracking how many of their signings appeared on a Top 30 Prospects list heading into this season.

The chart at right shows how many international signings from each team rank in a Top 30. Players are included with the team that originally signed them, whether they are still members of that organization or another one. So the Phillies get credit for shortstop Starlyn Caba, whom they signed out of the Dominican Republic but have since traded to the Marlins.

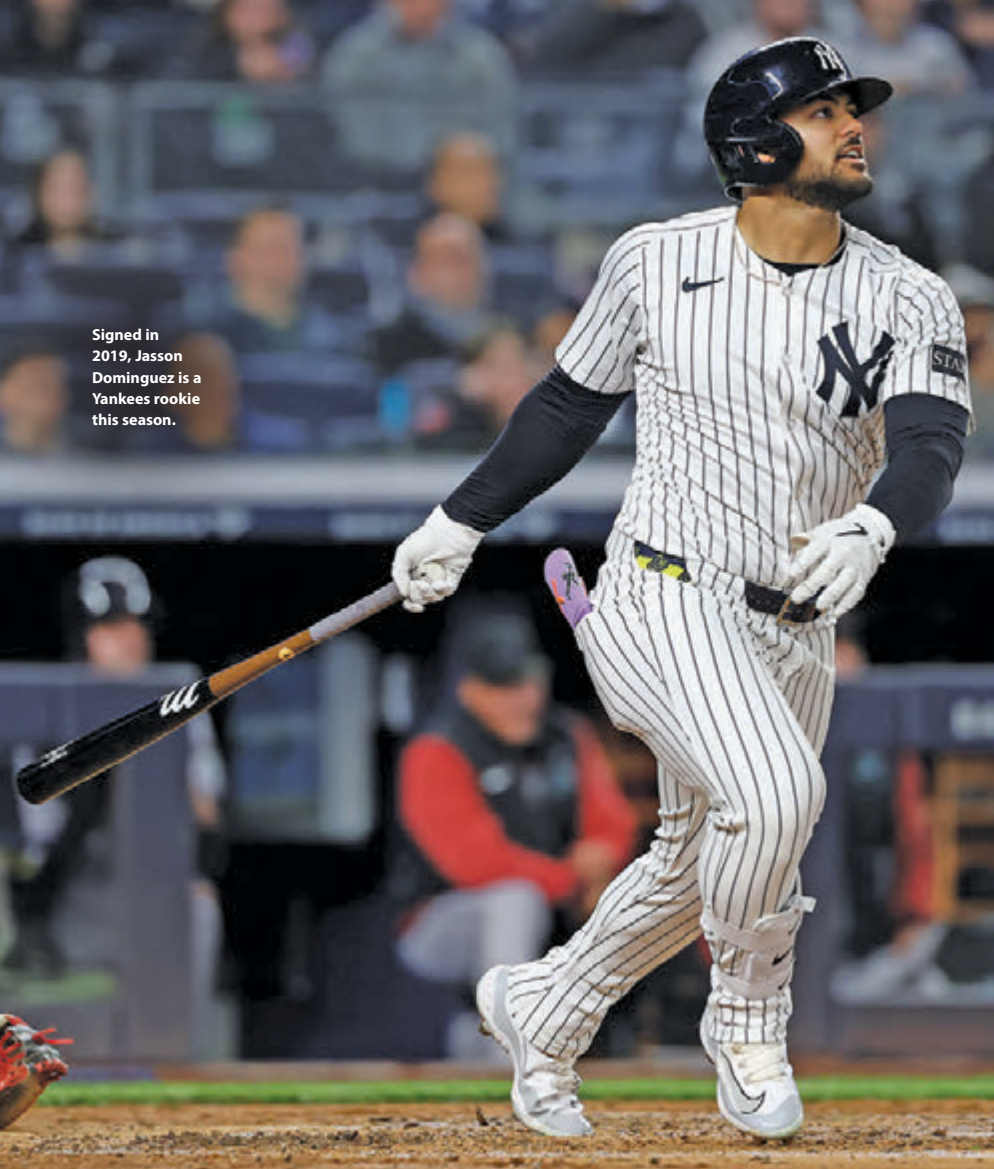
Obviously, this approach has limitations: Teams with thin farm systems that haven't drafted well should have a higher number of international signings, whereas teams that draft well and trade for prospects from other clubs might have fewer international signings who crack their Top 30.

Teams that frequently trade away prospects create more opportunities for international signings to rank in a Top 30.

Players who race to the major leagues at a young age won't appear here because they are no longer prospects. Often, those are the players who become high-impact talent. Elly De La Cruz (Reds), Jackson Chourio (Brewers), Eury Perez (Marlins), Junior Caminero (Guardians) and Ezequiel Tovar (Rockies) are among the best of that group.

Ultimately, the exact number of international signings a team has ranked in a Top 30 isn't the most important factor. The Guardians aren't particularly high up the list, but they signed Caminero and have two current top 50 prospects in shortstop Angel Genao and outfielder Jaison Chourio. But when we line up teams this way, we can look directionally at the state of international signings over the last seven or so years.

In general, the teams at the top of the list are faring well in the major leagues.



Signed in 2019, Jasson Dominguez is a Yankees rookie this season.

Team	Top 30	Notable Signings
Dodgers	18	RHP Roki Sasaki, OF Josue De Paula, C Thayron Liranzo
Yankees	18	OF Jasson Dominguez, OF Kevin Alcantara, C Agustin Ramirez
Red Sox	17	SS Franklin Arias, RHP Luis Perales, SS Yoelmin Cespedes
Padres	16	SS Leodalis De Vries, C Ethan Salas, RHP Jarlin Susana
Angels	15	C Edgar Quero, OF Nelson Rada, SS Joswa Lugo
Brewers	15	SS Jesus Made, C Jeferson Quero, SS Luis Peña
Rangers	14	SS Sebastian Walcott, SS Luisangel Acuña, RHP Emiliano Teodo
Phillies	13	SS Starlyn Caba, C Eduardo Tait, 2B Hao-Yu Lee
D-backs	12	RHP Yilber Diaz, SS Jansel Luis, 3B Deyvison De Los Santos
Braves	12	RHP Didier Fuentes, SS John Gil, OF Diego Ternes
Royals	12	SS Yandel Ricardo, C Ramon Ramirez, SS Warren Calcaño
Orioles	11	C Samuel Basallo, RHP Moises Chace, RHP Keeler Morfe
Rockies	11	OF Yanquiel Fernandez, OF Robert Calaz, 2B Juan Brito
Marlins	11	RHP Santiago Suarez, OF Luis Cova, OF Andrew Salas
Pirates	11	C Omar Alfonso, SS Tsung-Che Cheng, RHP Alessandro Ercolani
Giants	10	SS Marco Luciano, SS Josuar Gonzalez, OF Rayner Arias
Cubs	9	C Moises Ballesteros, SS Jefferson Rojas, SS Juan Tomas
Guardians	9	OF Jaison Chourio, SS Angel Genao, SS Welbyn Francisca
Twins	9	OF Emmanuel Rodriguez, OF Eduardo Beltre, C Ricardo Olivar
Cardinals	9	SS Yairo Padilla, C Rainiel Rodriguez, C Leonardo Bernal
Mets	8	SS Jesus Baez, SS Ronny Mauricio, SS Elian Peña
Blue Jays	8	SS Orelvis Martinez, LHP Kendry Rojas, RHP Fernando Perez
Reds	7	C Alfredo Duno, SS Ricardo Cabrera, RHP Luis Mey
Astros	7	RHP Miguel Ullola, RHP Anderson Brito, OF Kevin Alvarez
Mariners	7	SS Michael Arroyo, SS Felnin Celesten, OF Lazaro Montes
Tigers	6	C Josue Briceño, SS Franyerber Montilla, C Enrique Jimenez
Rays	6	OF Brailor Guerrero, RHP Yoniel Curet, RHP Jose Urbina
Nationals	6	SS Angel Feliz, SS Brayan Cortesia, RHP Andry Lara
Athletics	3	RHP Luis Morales, RHP Chen Zhong-Ao Zhuang, SS Edgar Montero
White Sox	2	RHP Cristian Mena, 3B Bryan Ramos

Let’s take a closer look at some of the teams at the top.

DODGERS

Yeah, Roki Sasaki counts, but we can set him aside for now. Outfielder Josue De Paula is a Top 100 Prospect signed out of the Dominican Republic. So is catcher Thayron Liranzo, whom the Dodgers traded to the Tigers last year in the Jack Flaherty deal. Outfielder Eduardo Quintero and shortstop Emil Morales are both exciting lower-level prospects. Note that those 18 players don’t include outfielder Andy Pages, a 2018 signing from Cuba who graduated last year.

The nine international signings who they traded and now rank in Top 30s for other organizations help stuff the Dodgers high up on this list. Meanwhile, there are teams that don’t have nine international signings ranked in any Top 30 at all. That’s a lot of trade value created from their international department.

YANKEES

Outfielder Jasson Dominguez entered the year as a Top 100 Prospect. So did Cubs outfielder Kevin Alcantara, whom the Yankees signed out of the Dominican Republic and traded to Chicago in 2021 for Anthony Rizzo. Catcher Agustin Ramirez, another Yankees signing from the Dominican Republic, is one of the Marlins’ top upper-level hitters after getting traded in the deal for Jazz Chisholm Jr. The Yankees have a few other international signings they have used as trade chips who are Top 30 prospects in other organizations, too. Like the Dodgers, the bar should be high to play in the major leagues for a team with their payroll, and these are the types of prospects the Yankees should be trading to bolster their big league club.

RED SOX

The Red Sox have the No. 1 farm system in baseball. Most of the attention deservedly goes to the big three of Roman Anthony, Kristian Campbell and Marcelo Mayer. Before they traded for Garrett Crochet, catcher Kyle Teel and outfielder Braden Montgomery were part of the group that soaked up most of the attention among Red Sox prospects. Beyond them, the Red Sox have plenty to be happy with from their international signings. In their 2023 class, they signed shortstops Franklin Arias and Yoeilin

Cespedes. Those are now two of the game’s best Latin American infield prospects in the lower levels, with Arias becoming a Top 100 Prospect. Righthander Luis Perales joined him in the Top 100 until Tommy John surgery knocked him off the list. Outfielder Jhostynxon Garcia is another top 10 prospect in the Red Sox system. Righthander Juan Valera, a \$45,000 signing out of the Dominican Republic in 2023, flashed filthy stuff this spring.

Righthander Dalvinson Reyes and first baseman/outfielder Justin Gonzales were two of the better prospects in the Dominican Summer League in 2024. The Red Sox pulled in one of the more exciting 2025 classes, too.

PADRES

The Padres signed the best international prospect in consecutive years. Now those two—shortstop Leodalis De Vries and catcher Ethan Salas—are both top 30 prospects in baseball. Righthander Jarlin Susana—traded to the Nationals in the Juan Soto deal—gives them a third international signing ranked in the Top 100, with Susana being the highest-ranked Dominican pitching prospect in baseball.

San Diego’s farm system thins out quickly because of how many prospects they have traded. Beyond those three players, the Padres have signed a range of intriguing pitchers, including Mexican righthanders Humberto Cruz and Victor Lizarraga (both top 10 prospects in the Padres system), righthander Bradgley Rodriguez and righthander Jairo Iriarte, whom they traded to the White Sox last year for righthander Dylan Cease.

BREWERS

The Brewers signed Jackson Chourio out of Venezuela in 2021, and he made his major league debut three years later as a 20-year-old. Today, he is one of the most exciting young players in baseball. Milwaukee’s top prospect is Jesus Made, who signed out of the Dominican Republic last year and is already a top 25 prospect. Catcher Jeferson Quero is another Top 100 Prospect. The combination of impact talent and depth of prospects the Brewers have signed out of Latin America in the last seven years stacks up with any team in baseball.

RANGERS

Shortstop Sebastian Walcott, signed out of the Bahamas two years ago, is the

best position prospect in the system and a top 20 prospect in baseball. Luisangel Acuña, who signed with the Rangers out of Venezuela, entered the year as a top 10 prospect with the Mets and is on their big league team. The Rangers’ system also houses two of the five highest BA-graded Dominican pitchers: righthanders Emiliano Teodo and Winston Santos, each signed for just \$10,000.

Two DSL Teams Are Better Than One

Let’s add another column to the chart: the number of teams each organization has in the Dominican Summer League.

We’re counting how many DSL teams a club had in 2024, though it should be noted some clubs have changed the number of teams they operate over the past seven years. The Giants and Yankees, for example, added a second DSL team in 2021. The Guardians have fluctuated between one and two teams in different years but have had two teams since 2021. The Astros, Marlins and Padres expanded from one to two DSL teams starting in 2022.

Team	Top 30	DSL Teams
Dodgers	18	2
Yankees	18	2
Red Sox	17	2
Padres	16	2
Angels	15	1
Brewers	15	2
Rangers	14	2
Phillies	13	2
D-backs	12	2
Braves	12	1
Royals	12	2
Orioles	11	2
Rockies	11	2
Marlins	11	2
Pirates	11	2
Giants	10	2
Cubs	9	2
Guardians	9	2
Twins	9	1
Cardinals	9	1
Mets	8	2
Blue Jays	8	1
Reds	7	1
Astros	7	2
Mariners	7	1
Tigers	6	2
Rays	6	2
Nationals	6	1
Athletics	3	1
White Sox	2	1



Bahamian shortstop Sebastian Walcott

There’s an unsurprising correlation here: Of the bottom 14 organizations, eight have only one DSL team, including five of the eight bottom organizations. Those five are the Reds, Mariners, Nationals, Athletics and White Sox.

Among the top 16 organizations, just two have only one DSL team.

It’s true the teams at the top have good scouting departments, but there are a lot of great scouts who work for clubs toward the bottom, too. Having two DSL teams translates to 35 extra roster spots. Those are 35 extra opportunities to find a big leaguer, uncover a hidden gem or simply get lucky.

That’s especially true given the uncertainty in predicting the future of players who sign at 16 or 17—many of whom commit to teams much earlier—particularly when it comes to pitching. The Mariners having only one DSL team but signing Julio Rodriguez and Noelvi Marte, plus three current Top 100 Prospects in Lazaro Montes, Michael Arroyo and Felnin Celesten, is still impressive.

Some teams have only one DSL team because their facility in the Dominican Republic lacks the space to house a second team. Owners who choose to operate with one DSL team—or opt not to invest in a modern academy capable of supporting a second DSL team—are putting their organizations at a competitive disadvantage. ■

MLB Debuts

SIGNING SCOUTS FOR NEW MAJOR LEAGUERS

MLB DEBUTS WITH THEIR SIGNING SCOUTS

We highlight the scouts who signed this year's major league debuts, with this installment covering the months of March and April. An asterisk (*) denotes a player selected in the 2024 Rule 5 draft.

Player, Pos.	Debut	Team	Signing Scout(s)
Matt Shaw, 3B	March 18	Cubs	Billy Swoope
Jack Dreyer, LHP	March 19	Dodgers	Mitch Schulewitz
Roki Sasaki, RHP	March 19	Dodgers	N/A
Drake Baldwin, C	March 27	Braves	JD French
Kristian Campbell, 2B	March 27	Red Sox	Kirk Fredriksson
Ryan Johnson, RHP	March 27	Angels	K.J. Hendricks
Max Muncy, 2B	March 27	Athletics	Dillon Tung
Alan Roden, LF	March 27	Blue Jays	Wes Penick
Hayden Senger, C	March 27	Mets	Chris Hervey
Cam Smith, RF	March 27	Astros	Ike Ballou (Cubs)
Liam Hicks*, C	March 28	Marlins	Dustin Smith (Rangers)
J.C. Escarra, C	March 29	Yankees	Kelvin Colon (Orioles)
Noah Murdock*, RHP	March 29	Athletics	Jim Farr (Royals)
Chad Patrick, RHP	March 29	Brewers	Jeremy Kehrt (D-backs)
Connor Thomas*, LHP	March 29	Brewers	Charles Peterson (Cardinals)
Gage Workman*, 3B	March 29	Cubs	Joey Lothrop (Tigers)
Brad Lord, RHP	March 30	Nationals	Alex Morales
Jake Mangum, OF	March 30	Rays	Jet Butler (Mets)
Tomoyuki Sugano, RHP	March 30	Orioles	N/A
Luarbert Arias, RHP	March 31	Marlins	Yfrain Linares/Trevor Schumm/Luis Prieto (Padres)
Ryan Gusto, RHP	March 31	Astros	Charlie Gonzalez
Garrett McDaniels*, LHP	March 31	Angels	Jonah Rosenthal (Dodgers)
Tyler Tolbert, OF	March 31	Royals	Nick Hamilton
Mike Vasil*, RHP	March 31	White Sox	Daniel Coles (Mets)
Omar Cruz, LHP	April 1	Padres	Trevor Schumm
Mason Fluharty, LHP	April 1	Blue Jays	Coulson Barbiche
Thomas Harrington, RHP	April 1	Pirates	Mike Bradford
Christian Koss, 2B	April 1	Giants	Jon Lukens (Rockies)
Shane Smith*, RHP	April 1	White Sox	Taylor Frederick (Brewers)
Tim Tawa, 2B	April 5	D-backs	Andrew Allen
Hunter Dobbins, RHP	April 6	Red Sox	Chris Reilly
Chase Dollander, RHP	April 6	Rockies	Scott Corman
Zac Veen, LF	April 8	Rockies	John Cedarburg
Tsung-Che Cheng, SS	April 9	Pirates	Fu-Chan Chiang
Michael Darrell-Hicks, RHP	April 11	Angels	Chris McAlpin
Chase Meidroth, SS	April 11	White Sox	J.J. Altobelli (Red Sox)
Logan VanWey, RHP	April 11	Astros	Jim Stevenson
Cole Henry, RHP	April 13	Nationals	Brandon Larson
Evan Sisk, LHP	April 15	Royals	Charles Peterson
Ben Williamson, 3B	April 15	Mariners	Ty Holub
Braxton Fulford, C	April 16	Rockies	Jesse Retzlaf
Justin Hagenman, RHP	April 16	Mets	Jonah Rosenthal (Dodgers)
Edgar Quero, C	April 17	White Sox	Brian Parker (Angels)
Matt Svanson, RHP	April 17	Cardinals	Tom Burns (Blue Jays)
Caleb Durbin, 3B	April 18	Brewers	JD French (Braves)
Luke Keaschall, 2B	April 18	Twins	Chandler Wagoner
Juan Morillo, RHP	April 19	D-backs	Oswaldo Villalobos/Francisco Cartaya/Roman Barinas (LAD)
Tirso Ornelas, LF	April 19	Padres	Trevor Schumm
Chandler Simpson, CF	April 19	Rays	Milt Hill
Brandon Young, RHP	April 19	Orioles	Dave Jennings
Patrick Monteverde, LHP	April 19	Marlins	James Vilade
Zach Agnos, RHP	April 20	Rockies	Jordan Czarniecki
Cade Gibson, LHP	April 20	Marlins	Brett Bittiger
Logan Henderson, RHP	April 20	Brewers	K.J. Hendrick
Paxton Schultz, RHP	April 20	Blue Jays	Jeff Scholzen (Brewers)
Agustin Ramirez, C	April 21	Marlins	Juan Piron (Yankees)
Ronny Simon, LF	April 21	Marlins	Mario Encarnacion/Gian Guzman/Jose Serra (CWS)
Craig Yoho, RHP	April 21	Brewers	Ginger Poulson
Sauryn Lao, RHP	April 22	Mariners	Manelik Pimentel/Roman Barinas (Dodgers)
Chase Lee, RHP	April 22	Tigers	Brian Morrison (Rangers)
Nathan Wiles, RHP	April 22	Braves	Jonathan Hall (Rays)
Zak Kent, RHP	April 23	Guardians	Brian Matthews (Rangers)
Nick Kurtz, 1B	April 23	Athletics	Neil Avent
Will Wilson, 2B	April 23	Guardians	Chris McAlpin (Angels)
Matt Gorski, 1B	April 24	Pirates	Anthony Wycklent
Juan Mejia, RHP	April 24	Rockies	Rolando Fernandez/Martin Cabrera
Ryan Bergert, RHP	April 26	Padres	Danny Sader
Jose Fermin, RHP	April 26	Angels	Jonathan Genao
Doug Nikhazy, LHP	April 26	Guardians	CT Bradford
Grant Wolfram, LHP	April 26	Orioles	Roger Coryell (Rangers)
Logan Evans, RHP	April 27	Mariners	Jackson Laumann
Maverick Handley, C	April 29	Orioles	Scott Walter
AJ Blubaugh, RHP	April 30	Astros	Drew Pearson
Tyler Callihan, 2B	April 30	Reds	Sean Buckley
Noah Cameron, LHP	April 30	Royals	Matt Price
Chase Petty, RHP	April 30	Reds	John Wilson (Twins)



Kristian Campbell looks like a fixture of future Red Sox lineups.

MADDIE MALHOTRA, BOSTON RED SOX/GETTY IMAGES (CAMPBELL)



Chase Dollander is the best pitching prospect the Rockies have ever had.



The Athletics drafted Nick Kurtz fourth overall out of Wake Forest last year.



The Marlins' Agustin Ramirez struck seven extra-base hits in his first five games.



Chandler Simpson sped to Tampa Bay after just 17 games at Triple-A Durham.



Cam Smith hit his way onto the Astros' Opening Day roster with a big spring.

In Memoriam

EXECUTIVE JOCKETTY MADE HIS MARK WITH THREE FRANCHISES

General manager Walt Jocketty molded the Cardinals into one of the most successful franchises of the 2000s. St. Louis won the National League pennant in 2004 and then the World Series in 2006.

Only the Yankees and Red Sox won more games than the Cardinals from 2000 to 2009. While Jocketty wasn't running the club in 2008 and 2009, St. Louis continued winning with all-stars he had acquired, including Albert Pujols, Yadier Molina, Adam Wainwright and Chris Carpenter.

Jocketty is most strongly associated with the Cardinals, but he made his mark in baseball with the Athletics and Reds as well. It was with Oakland in the 1980s that he got his start.

Hired as A's director of minor league operations and scouting in 1980, Jocketty helped build Oakland into an American League power. The Athletics were BA Organization of the Year in 1982, had BA Minor League Player of the Year Jose Canseco in 1985 and then produced successive AL Rookies of the Year Canseco, Mark McGwire and Walt Weiss from 1986 to 1988.

The A's won three straight American League pennants from 1988 to 1990, taking the World Series in 1989. By this time, Jocketty had been promoted to director of baseball administration, setting the stage for a stopover as Rockies assistant GM of player personnel in 1994.

The Cardinals hired Jocketty as GM on Oct. 14, 1994, against the backdrop of the most contentious work stoppage in MLB history, one that resulted in the cancellation of the World Series. Jocketty installed future Hall of Famer manager



Tony La Russa as manager in 1996. The two had worked together for nearly a decade in Oakland.

With Jocketty running baseball operations and La Russa managing the team on the field, the Cardinals embarked on one of their most successful periods. Between 1996 and 2007, St. Louis won six NL Central division titles, a wild card, a pennant, a World Series and a total of 1,055 games. The Braves were the only National League team with more wins in this window.

Despite Jocketty's success in St. Louis, a power struggle led to his ouster after the 2007 season. The Reds quickly hired him and elevated him to GM early in the 2008 season.

Jocketty oversaw one of the more successful recent periods in Reds history—two NL Central division titles, a wild card and a nod as Organization of the Year in 2012—during his time at the helm of Cincinnati baseball operations, which ran through 2015.

Jocketty died on April 25 in Phoenix. He was 74. ■

LONGTIME RELIEVER DOTEL LEAVES BEHIND LEGACY OF RELIABILITY, HUMILITY

To say Octavio Dotel had been everywhere would be an understatement.

When Dotel signed with the Mets out of the Dominican Republic in 1993, it was the beginning of a 21-year pro odyssey for the righthander. He played for 13 teams in 15 major league seasons, which was the all-time record for individual teams before Edwin Jackson surpassed him with 14 in 2019.

Dotel climbed as high as No. 45 on the 1999 Top 100 Prospects ranking and made his MLB debut as a 25-year-old that season, appearing in 19 games for the Mets, including 14 starts. New York dealt him to the Astros after the season as a key piece for lefthander Mike Hampton, who had finished runner-up for the National League Cy Young Award in 1999 but was one year away from free agency.

In Houston, Dotel emerged as a lights-out setup man for Hall of Fame closer Billy Wagner. Dotel spent five seasons with the Astros and, counting his relief work only, recorded a 2.40 ERA and 1.02 WHIP with 442 strikeouts in 337 innings. Houston sent him to the Athletics at the 2004 trade deadline in a three-team deal that imported another star and pending free agent: Carlos Beltran.

Dotel worked as a closer for Oakland down the stretch in 2004 but lost most of the 2005 season after having Tommy John surgery. He returned in 2006 and hung on for eight more seasons, adding the Yankees, Royals, Braves, White Sox, Pirates, Dodgers, Rockies, Blue Jays, Cardinals and Tigers to his career register.

Outside of being a reliable and durable



reliever, Dotel was known for his humor, humility and caring personality, often mentoring younger players later in his career. That made him a frequent trade target for contenders, and Dotel was traded during the season five times in his career.

Dotel finished his career with 758 appearances. He pitched to a 3.78 ERA with 1,143 strikeouts and 109 saves in 951 innings.

Dotel won his first and only World Series with the Cardinals in 2011 and returned to the Fall Classic with the 2012 Tigers, who came up short against the Giants. Dotel added more hardware by winning the 2013 World Baseball Classic with his native Dominican Republic.

Dotel died on April 8 at the Jet Set nightclub in Santo Domingo after the roof collapsed, claiming the lives of 232 people and injuring 225. He was 51. ■



BLANCO, PART OF INAUGURAL 2005 NATIONALS, PERISHES IN NIGHTCLUB TRAGEDY

Tony Blanco was a heralded Red Sox prospect who cracked the back of the Top 100 Prospects list in both 2001 and 2002.

The young Dominican third baseman showcased elite arm strength and bat speed he used to crack 13 home runs in the Gulf Coast League, a league record at

the time, and then 17 more in the Low-A South Atlantic League as a 19-year-old in 2001.

Boston would trade Blanco to the Reds after the 2002 season to acquire Todd Walker, who played second base every day for a 95-win Red Sox team in 2003. Blanco continued to show power as a Reds farmhand, only now as a first baseman. Still, Cincinnati left him unprotected for the 2004 Rule 5 draft, and the Nationals selected him.

Blanco appeared in 56 games for Washington in 2005, the debut season for the franchise that had relocated from Montreal. In his lone season in MLB, Blanco hit one home run and collected seven RBIs.

He bounced around the minor leagues for the

Nationals and Rockies, while spending winters in the Dominican League, before making a name for himself in Japan beginning in 2009. In eight NPB seasons, Blanco made four all-star teams and was given the Best Nine Award three times. The Best Nine is given annually to the best player at each position in NPB.

Blanco, along with Octavio Dotel, was a victim of the April 8 roof collapse at the Jet Set nightclub in Santo Domingo. It was reported that Blanco saved the life of former big leaguer Esteban German by pushing him out of the way as the roof began to collapse. Blanco was 44.

Blanco's legacy lives on through his son Tony Blanco Jr., a first base prospect who began the season on the injured list with the Pirates' Low-A Bradenton affiliate. ■



PERSPECTIVE

SPEED THRILLS

Once unthinkable, eye-popping pitching velocity has become the norm

J.J. COOPER

@JJCOOP36



The first time I purchased a cell phone, it wasn't by choice.

I had taken a new job in a new town in a new state. My work hours could be described as almost endless. But even if I left the office, my new job meant that I had to be reachable at pretty much any hour. So I was required to have a cell phone.

At the time, it seemed like an imposition and an adjustment. If my boss or anyone at the newspaper needed me, I was always available. Those days of hopping into my car for a two-hour drive and being in a cocoon of my own with the radio were over.

Within a decade of that first cell phone, I got my first smartphone. Today, I, like everyone else, cannot imagine the idea of being without the device that serves as my connection to the internet, camera, camcorder, recorder, email inbox, book, TV and, yes, even an actual telephone.

But if you think back, it's hard to pinpoint the moment when we went from the era where no one had a smartphone to the time where everyone did.

Watch a sporting event from the early 2000s. You'll notice no one is looking at their phone.

Watch a game from a decade later, and the faces in the crowd are recording key moments on a tiny screen.

If you picked any of us out of 2002, popped us into a time machine and dropped us into 2025, our 2002 selves would be blown away by how smartphones have utterly altered all aspects of our lives.

But there wasn't one specific day when I realized that the world had changed forever. I didn't buy my first smartphone and think that my life would forever be altered.

Dramatic change happens sneakily, one day at a time.

I couldn't help but think about that as I watched the Rangers' Jack Leiter and the Reds' Hunter Greene battle on April 2. Yes, the wind was blowing in at Cincinnati's Great American Ball Park, but it was one of those extremely well-pitched games that makes a 1-0 score thrilling.

Leiter topped out at 99.1 mph while facing just one over the minimum over five scoreless innings. He left after 70 pitches because of a blister on his pitching hand.

That 99.1 mph pitch, while very fast, was just the 53rd-hardest pitch thrown by a starter in the game. Greene had 33 pitches of 100 mph or faster and another 19 at 99.2 or harder. Greene was also exceptional, allowing one run on three hits in seven innings.

If you had taken me from 2005, popped me into that same time machine and dropped me off in Cincinnati for the game, it would have blown my mind.

In 2005, I would make two-hour drives to minor league ballparks in hopes of seeing one 100 mph pitch on my radar gun. It would take me another five years before I'd actually achieve that goal.

When Rays righthander Joe Boyle did it in a game for Triple-A Durham on April 1, it seemed almost normal. In person, I've seen multiple pitchers touch 100 mph this year, and so has most everyone on the BA staff.

Because velocity just keeps increasing every year, it's easy to not notice how the baseball world has been revolutionized.

Nowadays, 95 mph is often the price of admission to pitch as a professional.

It's ordinary.

The idea of seeing two starting pitchers get

to 97-plus for multiple innings once seemed impossible. Now, it's normal.

Yes, Leiter versus Greene had more velocity than a normal game, but Pirates starter Paul Skenes was also sitting at 97-99 mph at the same time in a different game.

Royals lefthander Cole Ragans was topping out at 98 mph, while Brewers starter Freddy Peralta got to 97 in a Royals-Brewers day-game matchup.

MacKenzie Gore topped out at 97 mph for the Nationals. Padres starter Dylan Cease reached 98. Tigers lefty Tarik Skubal hit 98.8, while Red Sox lefty Garrett Crochet touched 98. Zack Wheeler settled for a little under 97-96.6—and so did Blake Snell.

This was just an early-season Wednesday, and we saw starting pitchers reaching velocity numbers once reserved for only the hardest-throwing closers in the game.

It's not just the majors. In Triple-A, six starters on April 2 touched 96 or higher.

Throwing 96 just isn't special anymore. There were 195 major league pitchers who threw a pitch 96 or faster in the first week of the season. There were 140 Triple-A pitchers who could say the same.

It's not even just pros. The Arkansas Razorbacks' staff has seven pitchers who have reached 96 mph.

Even 98 mph has become pretty routine. We saw 91 pitchers reach that mark in the majors roughly one week into the season. Another 37 Triple-A pitchers had been up to 98, and that season was just five days old.

And 99 mph? Four pitchers on the Tennessee Volunteers' college staff had touched 99. So have four at Georgia.

A total of 10 Triple-A pitchers had topped 100 mph, to go with 18 big leaguers in the century club. We have seen multiple high school pitchers get to 100 mph this year.

There had already been more 101 mph or faster pitches in the majors this year as there were in the entire 2008 season. At this rate, the number will top the 2009 and 2011 seasonal totals before the end of April.

Torpedo bats? Sure, give hitters all the help they can get. It's a miracle that anyone can get a hit in today's game.

Through the first four series of the 2025 season, the MLB-wide batting average was .237. Last year it was .243. The year before .248. It hasn't topped .250 since 2019.

Pitchers today do what we once thought was rare. The game changed over many years—and yet the change was too quick for us to see the inflection point in real time.

Savor it. We're seeing pitchers do incredible things, even if they do them so often now that it's hard to remember how special it is. ■

Baseball America



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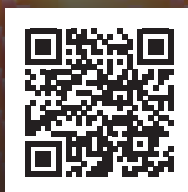
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BRING THE HEAT THIS SEASON

Outfitting All Star Moments



Take the field in style with Chromagear & FreeStyle Sublimation offering unparalleled customization and design lines, or gear up fast with popular stock selections from the trusted brands you know and love. With an unbeatable range of styles, colors, fits and accessories, we've got the perfect solution for every team's budget and game-day needs!

